MY ENEMY JONES

ROBERT BARR

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MY ENEMY JONES

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AN EXTRAVAGANZA

BY

ROBERT BARR

AUTHOR OF
"THE MUTABLE MANY" "STRANLEIGH'S MILLIONS" ETC.

LONDON
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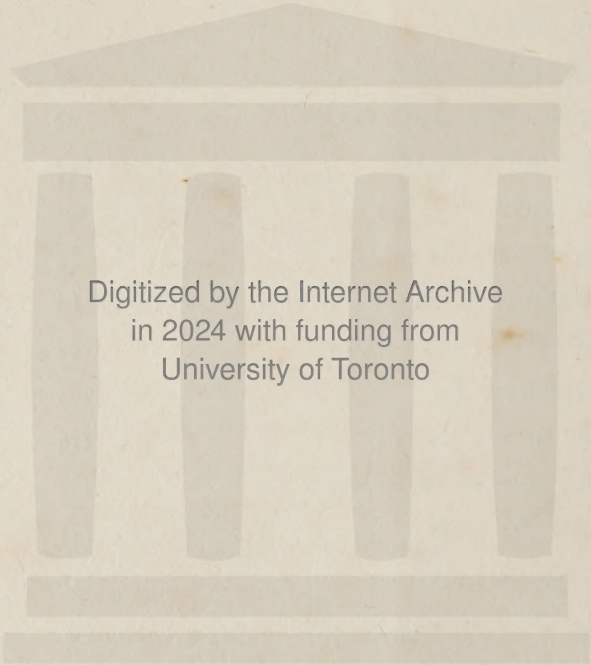
1913

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	A LITTLE UNPLEASANTNESS	1
II.	TWO ARRESTS	10
III.	IN A FRENCH COURT	22
IV.	IMPRISONED AMONG PICTURES	32
V.	"THE LAW'S DELAY"	45
VI.	"IN BRUGES TOWN"	61
VII.	THE GENTLEMAN'S NAME	73
VIII.	A CLERICAL ERROR	86
IX.	"WAR EVEN TO THE KNIFE"	98
X.	WHO RUNS AWAY	108
XI.	I PUT MY FOOT IN IT	119
XII.	THE PIED PIPER OF BRUGES	134
XIII.	AMONG THE BELLS	144
XIV.	"ENGLISH SPOKEN"	157
XV.	HOIST WITH HIS OWN PETARD	169
XVI.	A MATTER FOR ARRANGEMENT	180
XVII.	"BATTLE'S STERN ARRAY"	191
XVIII.	A COUPLE OF LETTERS	203
XIX.	"HE LAUGHS BEST——"	214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MY ENEMY JONES

CHAPTER I

A LITTLE UNPLEASANTNESS

At exactly 10.45 in the morning I entered the cheerful spaciousness of Victoria Station, where the Continental train stood waiting for me. With conscious superiority I passed the group of harassed people who for an hour or more had been registering their luggage for the Continent, and were now working desperate sums in mental arithmetic, trying to reduce pounds avoirdupois to kilos, and kilos to francs, and francs back to pounds—sterling, this time—in an endeavour to avoid being cheated on the amount they must pay for excess luggage over foreign railways. My own luggage consisted of a photographic outfit, and even when I carried it all, I still had a hand free with which to present for inspection my ticket from London to Lille, on the Belgian frontier.

I looked along the train until I found an empty compartment, and seated myself in the corner. Then I waited for the five minutes, before our train started, to pass. I like to have a compartment to myself, and it seemed possible that this time I might get what I wanted. I spread out all the morning papers, and the amusing and instructive illustrated weeklies I had bought at the bookstall, and prepared for a good selfish read from London to the South Coast.

One minute, two minutes, three minutes passed. Four minutes. Several had looked into the carriage, but one sight of me was enough—they passed on.

Four minutes and a half, three-quarters; then, just as the guard was going to lock the door, a gentleman strolled up in leisurely fashion, as if he had half a day to spare, and entered the compartment. He was a haughty, military-looking personage, with an infinite scorn of all the rest of the world in his eye: I disliked him the moment I saw him, and noticed that the dislike was mutual.

As the train moved off, he stood there and stared at me. I felt that I had done something in very

bad form, but had not the least idea what it was. As I picked up one of my papers he said, in a voice accustomed to command—

"You will please take the other side of the compartment."

I felt like answering, "I'll see you hanged first," but instead I said, "I am very comfortable where I am, thank you."

"I do not wish any of your insolence, sir."

"Well," I replied, slightly losing the firm hold I had on my temper, "if you keep on in that tone you will get it, and in large quantities, too. Sit down and don't make an ass of yourself."

"Sir," he said, "your language is unbearable, and I shall hold you to account for it. Meanwhile, I request you to remove yourself to the other side of the compartment. Part of my luggage is on the rack above you, and my portmanteau is beneath where you sit. If you had any experience in travelling you would know that that reserved to me the seat you are occupying."

"Look here," said I, with commendable mildness, "if you wanted this seat, you should have put your portmanteau *on* it, not under it. I did not notice your luggage. What you say about

usage is all right on the Continent, but not in England. I intend to remain where I am."

It is rather difficult for a man to maintain a standing position on a train moving swiftly around sharp curves. It is still more difficult to occupy that position with dignity. My opponent sat down.

His tone changed with his attitude.

"I presume you are going to France?" he remarked, in the blandest possible manner.

"I don't know that that is anybody's business but my own; still, if you want to know, I am."

"Thanks. You will have no objection, I presume, to exchanging cards with me, and to letting me know where you will remain while in Calais?"

"I do not intend to remain in Calais at all."

"Might I ask where you intend to go?"

"Lille will be my first stopping-place."

"Then, if you will favour me with the name of your hotel there, a friend of mine will do himself the honour of calling upon you."

"If you are diplomatically leading up to a duel, and are really serious about it, let me tell you that all your trouble is lost. The idea is too utterly ridiculous at this age of the world. I don't fight."

"Am I then to understand that you are one of that class of persons who take the liberty of insulting a man, refusing afterwards to accept the consequences?"

"You may understand what you like. I have no desire to converse further with you on this subject. It is too absurd. Besides, I want to read."

"Very good. Then let me inform you, sir, that on the earliest opportunity I shall have the pleasure of horsewhipping you in the first public place where I encounter you."

"All right. If you think it will be a healthful recreation for you, try it, but don't bother me about it *now*."

My enemy relapsed into silence. He sat at the other window, and at the opposite side from me, and his gaze rested on the fleeting landscape. He put his arm through the loop hanging for that purpose, and appeared to be resting as comfortably as could be expected from a man in his perturbed frame of mind.

Finally, he lit a cigar. I had a notion of telling him that we were not in a smoking compartment and that therefore he was rendering himself liable

to a fine of forty shillings, but I thought better of it, and lighted a cigarette myself. I tried to fix my attention on the news of the day, but my mind seemed so disturbed over the miserable little quarrel that I found it impossible to read. I found as little satisfaction in looking out at the pleasant hills of Kent, for the tardy remorse which some people feel after engaging in a dispute had possession of me, and I was not at all sure that I had acted quite blamelessly in the matter. Finally I said—

"If you wish this seat, I shall be very happy to exchange with you, now that hostilities have ceased."

"Do I understand you to offer me an apology?"

"No; I offered you this seat."

"Until you are prepared to offer me an apology for your language and conduct, I must beg you not to take the liberty of addressing me."

"You took the liberty of addressing me in the first place, and if your tone had been a trifle less dictatorial you would have had the place without a word. If you feel like apologising for your share in this utterly unworthy row, I shall be only too glad to apologise for my part in it."

"I have nothing to apologise for, sir, and I do not wish to have any conversation with you until you make reparation for your behaviour."

"All right. I'll let you know when I feel apologetic."

Meanwhile the altercation had no effect on the speed of the train. We began to get glimpses of the Channel which we knew, alas! we were so soon to cross. In a deep valley lay the old town of Hastings, with the square tower of its Norman church standing out against the blue water beyond. Then there was a dash into a tunnel, and other glimpses of the sea. At one spot stood the abandoned works of the Channel tunnel; then under Shakespeare's Cliff we went, and soon drew up on the great stone pier that protects the harbour of Dover. There was a fine view of the grand old Castle on the top of the white cliffs, but the thing that most interested the passengers was the sea with its white-crested waves.

It is a busy sight on Dover pier when the boat-train comes in, and an interesting one—to those who are not going across. Porters laden with bags and shawl-straps form a continual procession down the gang plank. Passengers throng the telegraph

office, which is under a shed near the train, to send off the last telegram they will be able to dispatch for a sixpence until they again touch Britain's shore. Then they hurry on board to secure comfortable places to be miserable in. I wonder why Providence put Britons on an island ?

They give you just enough time at the Calais station to buy a cup of coffee, but not enough time to drink it. Thus it is that the keeper of the Calais restaurant is such a rich man. Anybody would be who could conduct a hotel on that principle.

As I passed along the Brussels train looking for the place in which I had left my camera to secure a seat, I noticed my friend, the enemy, sitting in a corner all by himself. I turned back and found my own compartment farther in the rear. There is nothing on the road between Calais and Lille that calls for attention: the railway runs through flat, Hollandish country. Thus I was able to give my attention to the literature I had neglected on my way to Dover, interrupted only by the entrance of the guard, who tore off as much of my ticket as suited him, then left me again to my reading.

Still the memory of that ridiculous quarrel about

the seat disturbed me, and I began to feel heartily ashamed of it. I thought about the aristocratic-looking man who was my opponent, and said to myself that he ought to have had better sense. I strongly suspected that he was a military man. I wondered what his name was. I had ignored his offer of a card, and was therefore in the dark about that. I must call him something, so that I could think of him by some appellation, so mentally I named him "Jones." I wondered whether I should ever meet Jones again, and smiled as I thought of the inappropriateness of the cognomen.

The train stopped at Armentières, whose tall chimneys proclaimed it a manufacturing town. There seemed to be a commotion on the station platform, and I looked out. I started up with an exclamation of astonishment.

Two gendarmes of gorgeous appearance had arrested my enemy Jones.

CHAPTER II

TWO ARRESTS

THE station platform at Armentières presented a strange sight. The moment it was known that an arrest had been made passengers rushed from their compartments, and the usual crowd of station loafers gathered around. One gorgeous official was at Jones's right side, the other on the left, and the guard was talking volubly to all three. The native serenity which distinguished Jones seemed somewhat ruffled, and he tried to expostulate with those who had him in charge, but in vain. Several Englishmen had got off the train, but none appeared to look on the affair as any of his business. On the contrary, one shrugged his shoulders when I inquired what the matter was, and replied indifferently that he supposed it was some polished swindler trying to get into Belgium, and who had been caught.

I pushed my way into the crowd around the

man, and asked what was the trouble. He froze up visibly as he saw me, but, noticing no unseemly triumph in my eyes, he replied briefly—

"Oh, nothing! At least, a mere trifle. I have lost my pocket-book, with money and ticket."

"You wish to continue your journey beyond Armentières? How far do you want to go?"

"All I ask of these people is that they will take me on to Lille, which is, I believe, the next stop. There I have plenty of friends; here I know no one. With the usual stupidity of foreign officials, they refuse, and furthermore, they seem to suspect me of trying to cheat them."

"I will pay your fare from Calais to Lille," said I. "How much is it?"

The Englishman's manner instantly became so frigid that instinctively I felt for the buttons of my overcoat, which I had thrown open.

"I regret," he said, "that I cannot accept a favour from you, although I thank you for the offer. I prefer to be indebted to one of my own countrymen."

"Very well. I may say, however, that those of your own countrymen to whom I have spoken are pretty unanimous in the opinion that you are a

swindler. I think you are intensely disagreeable, and I dislike you exceedingly, but I don't believe you are a swindler. It is because I hate you, and want to make you feel uncomfortable, that I offer you the money."

"Well, on that basis I will take it," acquiesced Jones, with the manner of one who bestows an unmerited favour.

The police reluctantly let him go, and the guard accepted my money with a disappointed air. Everybody seemed to feel cheated out of something.

"When did you have your pocket-book last?" I asked.

"I paid for my lunch at Calais, and——"

"Did not have time to eat it," I interjected, thinking regretfully of my untouched cup of coffee.

"Exactly. Foolishly I put the pocket-book in an inside pocket of my overcoat, and when they began to shout 'En voiture' I flung the coat over my arm and ran for the train. I opened the door of a compartment seemingly empty"—here he appeared a trifle embarrassed—"but found some luggage there. I went on until I came to a compartment quite disengaged, and the porter put in my bags. It was not until the man came for my

ticket that I looked for my pocket-book, and then I could not find it. It must have dropped out as I was rushing back and forth."

"I am very sorry——" I began, but at that moment we were ordered on the train again, and we each sought our respective compartments.

"Now," said I to myself, "that idiotic man made a bolt in here, but he didn't like to say so. He saw my camera on the seat where I left it before I went to contribute that gratuity to the restaurant man. It is not likely that the run from the restaurant did much to shake out the pocket-book, for Jones is not a man who in any possible circumstances would do anything hurriedly. That book either dropped out while the coat was over a chair in the restaurant, where very likely he placed it, or fell out when Jones got the sudden shock of seeing my camera in the corner: such a sight would probably make him pause very abruptly. If it did that, it ought to be here now.

"The door was on the left-hand side. It opens in this direction. Jones must have entered, in his hurry, at this sort of angle. Therefore the book, if it dropped, would most likely roll under the seat I am now sitting on."

This course of reasoning led me to stoop down and feel under the seat. The next instant I pulled out the pocket-book !

Of course you need not believe this story unless you like. That is one great advantage my writings have : each reader may believe just as much or as little as suits his fancy. Nevertheless, to prove that such reasoning can arrive at an accurate conclusion, I will pause here just long enough to relate a story whose truth is vouched for by high authority.

One day in a particular autumn there disappeared from an important post office a very valuable letter—a letter that contained a large amount of money. The clerks through whose hands it passed had always been regarded as above suspicion, yet this fact remained—the letter was gone.

The whole detective force exercised their ingenuity to find that letter, but without success. They sent decoy letters ; they searched the rooms of those through whose hands the letter had passed ; they shadowed the men ; they did everything that thought or experience could suggest, but still no letter. Most of the winter was consumed in an unavailing search for the valuable document, but the officials were completely nonplussed. One

detective in particular had cudgelled his brains over the unfortunate letter, yet without being rewarded by even the faintest trace of a clue. One day he stood by the table of the man through whose hands the letter was supposed to have passed just before it disappeared. This clerk appeared to be as anxious as anyone that some trace of the missive should be discovered, for although nothing was said to him, he knew very well that he was one of the suspected. He had been stamping the letters at the table before him, and doing it very fast. The letters bunched up as he shoved them from him to the other side of the table, but they were prevented from falling on the floor by a board that ran along three sides of the table. The table was set against the window.

"Doesn't the sun trouble you at this window in the summer?" asked the detective.

"We are not over-troubled with the sun in London, sir," answered the clerk, "but when it does shine strong enough to bother us, we pull down the blind."

Then said the detective to himself—

"All the blinds are spring blinds. Now, wouldn't it be possible for the blind to be down, get a letter

entangled with it, and go up again, released by the caretaker of the rooms, or perhaps be sent up by accident? "

Following his thoughts, his glance wandered up the string of the blind, and there, near the ceiling, covered with dust, was lodged the letter that the entire detective force of the post office had been trying for months to find.

By and by we ran under the fortifications of the city of Lille, and through into the rather dark, covered station. I slung my camera over my shoulder, and looked among the passengers to find the tall form of Jones. I saw him shaking hands warmly with a couple of men who had evidently come to meet him. When he caught sight of me, he said—

" I am happy to return your most opportune loan, and I hope you will permit me to thank you for it."

" That's all right," I replied. " I assure you I did not need the money between here and Armentières. By the way, I imagine that this is your pocket-book. I found it under the seat in my compartment after we left the last station."

" Yes; that is it. It would seem that I am now doubly indebted to you."

"Not at all. In fact, I may call myself the whole cause of the trouble, for I presume you bolted when you saw my camera in the corner, and thus lost your pocket-book."

Jones was obviously somewhat embarrassed by this outspoken statement, but he spoke with dignity.

"Er—yes; there is probably some truth in your supposition. Not that I regard you as responsible, you know, but—you are right about the camera."

"Well, there is no reason to be ashamed of that," said I. "My camera has caused many a stout heart to quail, especially after the victims saw the kind of photographs I perpetrate. Good afternoon."

I went out of the station, and discovered that it faced a small square, where stood a row of particularly antiquated open carriages, which I found later were designed especially to collect every possible draught. I spoke to that driver who seemed most solicitous that I should receive a hearty welcome to his native city.

"Vooley-voo transportey moy—er—er—to la Hôtel de Flanders et la Angleterre?" I requested.

This double-named hotel had been recommended to me by a friend. The cabman smiled, and touched his glazed hat. I thought he was smiling at my French. I knew that it had caused a great deal of amusement all over the Continent, so I did not wonder at his grin, but a moment after I saw that there was another reason for his merriment. He whipped up his horse, crossed the square, which is a couple of hundred feet wide, and there was the Hotel of Flanders.

I paid him his franc and three-quarters, and we mutually grinned. Evidently he had not hooked such an easy victim for a long time.

The Brussels express had brought us to Lille punctually at its scheduled time of half-past four, and by now the memory of that unconsumed cup of coffee at Calais grew more and more insistent. So, before attempting to explore the city, I enjoyed a substantial meal, which was an excellent one, and when I finished, it was too late for any chance of obtaining good photographs. I set out without my camera, therefore, and being always attracted by the picturesque and historical, I avoided the new town, built in the most modern Parisian style, and made for what a friendly hotel porter called

the old town. Lille, however, has been so often levelled by shot and shell that there are practically no historical monuments or ancient buildings remaining. The Hôtel de Ville protects with its Renaissance building the interesting old Council Chamber which is the only remnant existing of the Palais du Rihour, built by Philip the Good early in the fifteenth century.

The next morning was fine, and the sun shone brightly. As the weather for the week past had been somewhat uncertain, I resolved to make good use of the bright day, and so slung my camera over my shoulder, took the tripod in my hand, and set out in search of subjects for my lens.

I walked down a fine street, with shops looking quite Parisian in their attractiveness, came to a sort of market square, and turned up another street which led me to a little park. Near the entrance to this park was a bronze statue of a woman holding a child by its arms, while the little one's feet paddled in the water. It was a pretty group, so I set my camera down and prepared to take a photograph of it.

Quite a crowd collected round to see the strange

spectacle of a man photographing, and the interest they evinced should have warned me I was doing something unusual. I did not object to the curiosity of these people, as I was not personally acquainted with any of them, and didn't know whether the remarks they were so lavish with were complimentary or the reverse. A somewhat extended experience of that sort of thing led me to think they were the reverse.

I found some difficulty in convincing the crowd that persisted in standing in front of the camera, that it was the statue of which I wished to make a picture, not themselves, handsome though they undoubtedly were. At last, however, I succeeded, and secured a good picture.

It was the first and last I took in Lille.

A splendidly apparelled *agent de police*, with a cocked hat and a grand gesture, parted the crowd much more quickly than I had done when endeavouring to take the photograph. Raising his hat, he said something that sounded like—

"Votre perrrmittey, monsieur, se voo play."

"Permit for what?"

He wanted my permit for photographing, I judged by his language and gesture.

I informed him, in a mixture of good English and bad French, that I hadn't any.

Then would I allow him to take the liberty of arresting me?

Certainly, with pleasure.

At this interesting point of the conversation he put his hand on my right shoulder, while another officer excused himself for taking a similar liberty with my left.

I wanted to fold up my camera, but was not permitted to do so. It would be tampering with the evidence, it seemed, and as I had been caught red-handed, there was to be no meddling with the incriminating evidence. A third official carefully took the instrument, just as it stood, with the black cloth fluttering like a pall over it, and thus, with the rabble at our heels, we went down the street that but a few moments before I had come up alone.

As we were about half-way to the square again a cab came towards the procession. As it neared us, the occupant waved an umbrella as a signal for the driver to stop. He obeyed at once. Down from the carriage, natty London umbrella, neatly rolled, in hand, stepped my enemy Jones.

CHAPTER III

IN A FRENCH COURT

"I SAY," cried my opponent, advancing with such haste as his dignity would allow, "what's the difficulty now?"

"I seem to be in the hands of the law," I replied, "for the heinous crime of taking a photograph."

I expected the Englishman to make light of the alleged offence, but he looked exceedingly grave.

"This is serious," he said. "Haven't you a permit? No? Then what possessed you to attempt photography in Lille without a permit?"

"Well, if it comes to that," I replied, with some indignation, "I have taken photographs all over Paris without molestation. Lille is somewhat less important to France than Paris, isn't it?"

"So far as photography is concerned," said Jones very impressively, "it is *more* important, and it is extremely dangerous to sketch or photo-

graph without first obtaining the proper documents authorising you to do so."

"Why these precautions?"

"From the devotion with which you studied your Baedeker yesterday, I should have judged you could answer that question for yourself. Did you not read that Lille is a frontier town, and a strongly fortified one at that? It is completely surrounded by fortifications—a city within a fortress."

"But, even so, what harm can the photograph of a statue in the park do? If every soldier in the German army had a copy of that picture, I don't suppose they would take France a day sooner if war broke out."

"I am not disposed to discuss the question. I am merely stating a fact. Unless you want to spend some time in a French prison, I advise you to speak as deferentially as possible to the magistrate, and promise anything he asks, which, at the least, will probably be that you fold up your camera, and get over the frontier into Belgium at once. The chances are, however, that he will confiscate the camera, and send you to prison."

"Well, if he does that, I'll go willingly, but I shall raise an international row, I promise you.

The thing is too absurd. Do you imagine the United States will stand calmly by while that camera is confiscated and I am cast into a French bastille? You don't know the States as well as I do. The U.S.A. will make that magistrate wish he had never been born, if he attempts to imprison me."

"Oh, I haven't the slightest doubt that you are a very valuable citizen, and that the States would be extremely sorry to lose you, nor do I question that the affair will all come right in the end, most probably as soon as the American Minister at Paris hears about it. Nevertheless, I wish to say that all this procedure will take time, and the romance of a dungeon cell will possibly wear off by the second day, while the chances are that on the third day you will contract fever, for the prison at Lille has never been looked upon as a health resort. Take my advice, and be as civil as you can, and do your best to get off as easily as possible. I suppose you speak French?"

"Fluently, but the Frenchmen don't seem to understand it. They are a stupid lot."

"They are, but not half so foolish as the man who runs his head into trouble unnecessarily. I will see you out of this, if you will allow me."

"I don't know that I want to get out of it. Imprisonment in France would give me something to write about. It isn't every day that a person has a chance to go to prison."

"Very well. You will still need an interpreter. Allow me to act in that capacity."

"I shall be very much obliged if you will."

"I am happy to do so. Here we are. Just wait a moment, while I dismiss my cab, which has followed us. We shall be lucky if we find the magistrate sitting."

The magistrate was there, and the case was presented to him. The tripod was set up in the awful presence, and the black cloth thrown over the villainous instrument. Then the cross-examination began.

I regret being compelled to state that Jones took a very mean advantage of my deficient knowledge of the French language. This breach of trust I did not discover until I reached my hotel, and then it was on his own confession. I intended at first, in recording this duplicity, to have the phrases used by him transcribed here in the original French, by someone who writes that language, but as this, after all, is an English book, it will probably be

better to stick to English words. The reader who speaks French is invited to translate the sentences back into that tongue for himself. Others are politely requested to imagine them written in French.

JONES: "He wants to know how many photographs you took, and what they were."

MYSELF: "Tell him I took one only of the statue in the park."

JONES (in French, to the magistrate): "He says that he had not yet taken a picture. He had merely adjusted the camera into focus when arrested."

MAGISTRATE (in French): "He must promise not to attempt to take any more photographs in this city without written permission."

JONES (to me, in English): "He says the proper thing is to obtain a written permission to photograph, and then you will not be molested."

MYSELF: "Well, you say that I will do nothing of the kind. I only want to take the objects of interest here, if there are any, and I defy them to put me in prison for a thing like that."

JONES (in French): "He regrets exceedingly that he has infringed on the custom here, and promises to take no more photographs."

MAGISTRATE (in French): "In that case he is allowed to go, but you will please tell him that he is severely reprimanded."

JONES (to me): "He says that you may go, and he will reprimand the police for interfering with so distinguished and courteous a gentleman."

MYSELF: "Ah! at last he is talking sense. Has he anything further to say?"

JONES (in French): "He is deeply grateful to your honour, and awaits your further commands."

MAGISTRATE (in French): "How long does he intend to remain in Lille?"

JONES (to me): "His honour hopes you are pleased with the city of Lille, and would be pleased to know how long they will have the privilege of seeing you here."

MYSELF: "Well, I don't know that it is anybody's business, but as he is so civil about it, you might say that I expect to be here a couple of days."

JONES (in French): "He says that he is charmed with the city of Lille, which he considers a second Paris, and that, if he has your honour's permission, he would like to stay two more days."

MAGISTRATE (in French): "The permission is

granted, but he will understand that he is under police supervision until he leaves ? "

JONES (to me) : " His honour hopes that your stay will be pleasant, and he says that anything he and the police can do to make it so they will be only too happy to perform."

MYSELF : " Well, all I want from them is that they will leave me alone, and I wish you would tell him that I think this photograph fuss is extremely silly. France has a good deal to learn before she becomes a model republic. She doesn't know the real meaning of the word liberty."

JONES (in French) : " He trusts that your honour will permit him to remark that he has travelled in all parts of the world, and has seen justice administered in various forms and by many distinguished judges, but that he has never witnessed such dignity and decorum on the bench as it has this day been his good fortune to behold."

The judge bowed profoundly at this, and the case was dismissed.

Jones said he would walk with me as far as the hotel. He had something to say to me, but first he wished me to promise that I would take no more photographs until I got into Belgium, which, being

a despotic monarchy, was more liberal in these matters. I readily gave the promise, and he then told me the whole story of his conduct in the court-room.

"Do you consider such a course as that strictly honourable?" I asked indignantly.

"Frankly, I do not. But you will excuse me if I say that you are such a fool that I was compelled to act as I did. Yesterday you conferred on me a favour I was reluctant to accept, and I could not but feel deeply in your debt. I have now, fortunately, had the opportunity of rendering you one in return. Now, sir, we are on equal terms again, and permit me to say that you are an unmitigated ass."

"I am only too happy to be in a position to return the compliment," I returned, with a suavity as polished as his own.

"Sir, that is but a poor way of saying 'You're another.' If anything I can say will put a little courage into you, I wish you would tell me what it is."

"Oh, you still wish to fight, do you?"

"Certainly."

"Then why don't you say so, or send your second to me?"

"Because you have refused to accept my challenge."

"Oh, that was yesterday, and in England. Here I would rather fight you than not. I am staying at the Flanders and Angleterre Hotel."

Jones took off his hat, bowed politely, and then turned on his heel.

That evening there called to see me a young Englishman, whom I recognised as one of the men who had welcomed Jones at the station when we arrived at Lille. He came at once to the point of his visit.

"My principal," he said courteously, "sent me to confer with you in reference to a coming meeting."

"All right," I answered. "By the way, I don't happen to know your principal's name."

"My principal considered that was perhaps as well left out of the question. He offered you his card yesterday, and I understand you refused it. We have talked over the matter, and I have persuaded him that it is better no names should be mentioned in this lamentable affair. He has no desire to learn yours. Now, could you refer me to a friend of yours with whom I might consult in this matter?"

"I am sorry," I replied, "but I know no one in Lille. However, I am perfectly willing to act as my own second. That would be satisfactory, I presume?"

"I am afraid not," he said gravely. "We—at least, I—would not care to act unless you had a friend on the ground. Still, that may be held over for future consideration. The meeting cannot take place in Lille. You are under police surveillance, a fact which in the heat of the moment Mr.—that is, my principal, overlooked. We should be interrupted. To what Belgian city do you intend going first?"

"I shall go on to Bruges when I leave here."

"That will suit us perfectly," declared my visitor courteously, "and I may say that there could not be a better spot for our purpose. My friend leaves for Bruges in a couple of days, and he will be only too happy to meet you there."

"The pleasure will be entirely mutual," I assured him.

CHAPTER IV

IMPRISONED AMONG PICTURES

HAVING Jones off my mind for at least a couple of days, I turned my attention to Lille. The city was, as Jones had said, a fortress, and an important one. There had been a time when Lille was much smaller than when I saw it, and then it had been a smaller fortress. That fortress was demolished, and the new walls were built much farther out. This gave the city breathing-room, and it breathed. This demolition took place in 1858, at which time the population was nearly eighty thousand. Now it is almost three times that figure, and still Lille is growing. It is only of late years it has had a chance to expand, because for centuries it was sometimes more than it could do to maintain its existing dimensions.

Lille was founded early in the eleventh century by the fourth Count Baldwin of Flanders, but it passed through various hands, for some time being

in the possession of the Dukes of Burgundy, one of whom was the *Philippe le bon* whose Council Chamber is still intact in the Hôtel de Ville. The fortifications of Lille are said to be the most successful ever constructed by that master-builder of fortresses, Vauban, who gained special distinction at the siege of Lille, in 1667, the year in which Louis XIV. captured the city from the Spaniards.

Lille seems to have made sieges a habit, for it sustained seven of them, and gave a good account of itself every time, even though compelled to surrender on occasion. In 1708, when besieged by the allied armies of Marlborough and Eugène for three months, the people were not content with the strenuous fighting going on above ground, but fought bitterly in the subterranean galleries of the city, the miners of the rival armies doing their best each to destroy the mines of the opposing force. This gallant defence notwithstanding, Lille had to yield at last, but five years later the Treaty of Utrecht restored the city to France. Even then, however, its troubles were not ended, for in 1792 it was bombarded by the Austrians; but nothing could quench the spirit of that determined fortress. Bombs filled with oil of turpentine rained over the

city, but the dauntless citizens organised themselves into fire-brigades, and with pails of water kept in check the ravages caused by those flame-splashing balls. Carlyle commemorates the barber who, when a bomb burst close to him, snatched up a fragment, and made a lather of soap in it, crying, " My new shaving-dish ! " and the courage of the besieged citizens was still more surely typified by the " fourteen people " who consented to be shaved there and then.

Since then, however, Lille has been making up for lost time, and has become of such industrial importance that it is fifth in rank among the cities of France. As a fortress Lille is among the first class, and I should like to say more about the brick and earthen wall that surrounds it, and about the citadel, but my investigations were so obviously frowned down upon by the French Government, represented by the police force of Lille, that gradually I began to see it would be wiser to turn my attention to more ordinary sight-seeing.

The way I do a town is this. It has at least the merit of being cheap. I get into an electric tram, and go as far as it does. It always lands a person somewhere on the outskirts of the town. Then I

circumnavigate the place on foot until I come to the terminus of another line, and on that I travel to the centre of the town again. Next I take another that goes somewhere else, until I have patronised every route in the city. By standing on the platforms a very good idea of the place is obtained, and by purchasing the goodwill of the conductor with a few sous all the objects of interest will be pointed out and the name of any building given.

Of course, where a Government allows me to take photographs I hire a carriage, and do the thing in style. Carriages in Lille cost two francs for the first hour, and a franc and three-quarters for each succeeding hour. If I had been permitted to photograph in peace, I should have spent francs on carriages instead of centimes on trams, and thus I should have left a great deal more money in the country—a fact I commend to the attention of the authorities.

The tram I commenced with took me out to the walls. Here was a massive archway which led into the open country. Lille stopped right at the walls. There were no suburbs. On one side of the fortification you were in town ; on the other

lay flat, open country. Men dressed like officers of high rank, but who were in reality only every-day customs examiners, were stationed at the gates, and every fellow in a cart had to stop and give an account of himself and his load. The gorgeous officials plunged long swords here and there into loads of hay, and if anyone had been concealed inside they would have suffered as did Polonius when Hamlet made his sword-thrust through the arras. One of the trams took me past a splendid building—the Prefecture.

A native of the town told me that Napoleon III., when in Lille, was rather displeased with the splendour of the Prefecture.

"It is too grand," he said. "Even I have not a palace like that."

The good people of Lille tell this anecdote as they shake their heads over the extravagance of building such an edifice. It seems to them that Napoleon's condemnation was a stern rebuke to those who projected the building. It never appears to strike them that a usurper had no right to a palace of any sort, or even a house, for which he didn't pay rent, while the people whose money built the Prefecture had every right to erect any

kind of building they pleased. I very much think that the worthy citizens of Lille are monarchists at heart : they are merely playing at a republic.

I discovered that although I might not take pictures in Lille, I was allowed to look at them ; indeed, Lille is justly proud of her collection of paintings. The pictures in Lille are second only to that celebrated collection in the Louvre, and the picture-gallery is free to all comers.

I spent most of the afternoon looking through the spacious rooms, and, no doubt, was lost in admiration over the poorest paintings. One large picture I stood in front of for a long time, until I noticed that Mr. Baedeker, of the guide-book, had not marked it with a star, and those who travel know that anything that Mr. B. does not mark with a star is not worth looking at. This particular painting was by J. J. Weerts, and it was entitled " The Legend of St. Francis of Assisi," whatever the legend was. Of one thing I am certain, which is that there were several guineas' worth more paint on it than there were on many of the pictures that Mr. Baedeker has marked with a star. This picture represented the gloomy interior of some monastery or church. On the left-hand side were

approaching a number of high dignitaries of the Church of Rome, and their splendid apparel was in marked contrast to their sombre surroundings. Down a stairway facing the spectator came the figure, I presume, of St. Francis. He was dressed in one simple flowing robe, and his face was gaunt, wan, and pale. A wonderful radiance seemed to surround him, illuminating the dark stairway which he was descending. He gazed on the others with a look of severity that should have been enough to paralyse them, and indeed evidently did. I imagined from their looks of consternation that St. Francis was an apparition, and the moral of the picture I interpreted to be that the Holy Church had other work for her servants than living on the fat of the land and dressing in royal apparel.

I have not enough confidence in myself as an art critic, nor, for that matter, has the public, to warrant my saying much about the superb collection at Lille. The gallery that interested me most was that containing the wonderful assemblage of drawings gathered together by the painter, J. B. Wicar. This artist was a native of Lille, but he spent a great deal of his life in Italy, and

there are a great many valuable drawings by Italian masters in the collection he bequeathed to his native city. A number of the drawings are original studies for great paintings, and wherever it was possible, Wicar obtained engravings from the original picture, as well as the studies.

But the gem of the collection is a head modelled in wax, which at one time was ascribed to Raphael, but is now known to be a very much older piece of work, and is supposed by some to have come from an ancient Roman tomb. This I was very anxious to see. I was therefore more than disappointed when I tried the door of the room in which this bust is shown, and found it locked. After shaking and pounding at the door, it was finally opened from the inside by a surly attendant who said something very gruffly in French. He wore no shoes, but held one in his hand, and I suppose I disturbed him in the act of putting it on. When he finished speaking, he slammed the door in my face and locked it. I searched for one of the attendants of the gallery, and pointed out to him on the page of the guide-book what I wanted to see. He understood, and came with me to the door, and rapped. The door was almost instantly

flung open, and the fellow inside was obviously in a raging temper. He explained in a loud voice to the attendant why admission was refused, and his explanation seemed quite satisfactory to my escort. The door was slammed shut again, and the attendant tried courteously to explain why I was excluded. I didn't understand in the least what he was driving at, but I became more and more resolved to see that head.

I went to the chief man in the gallery, and made him comprehend what I wanted. He looked at his watch, and evidently saw no reason why the room should be closed, so he came with me, and we tried the door for the third time. The fellow had one shoe on by this time, although he had not got it laced. He was red-hot with anger now, and it did not make him any more pleasant to me that the official was more highly placed than the ordinary attendant, and that he had to suppress himself in consequence.

Still, the explanation he made was satisfactory to the official, who shrugged his shoulders and seemed to express regret, while I judged from what he said that to-morrow the room would be open. That, however, afforded me small consolation, for

next day I should probably be in Bruges, perhaps fighting a duel with my enemy Jones.

I went downstairs to the office of the gallery, and laid my case before the chief official there. He came up with me.

The guardian of the closed door had by now put on his second shoe, and I knew he was yearning to use it on me, for it was on the right foot. He was a volcano of suppressed rage. The official accompanying me entered upon an eloquent discourse of expostulation, threatening, and finally coaxing, but it availed nothing. Finally the other produced a document, and when the official saw it he shook his head. It was evidently final. I could not get in *that* day.

I asked to see the paper. It was signed by the Mayor of the city.

Once more the door was slammed and locked. There was a sort of day-of-judgment resolution about the fastening of it that made me fear all my efforts would be in vain. Nevertheless, said I to myself, if the Mayor has caused this room to be closed, the Mayor can cause it to be opened again. I will interview the Mayor.

I found that gentleman to be an excellent linguist,

and I told him that I had come five thousand miles, more or less, to see the celebrated head of Lille. I had found the door closed, and in spite of the aid of various officials I was refused admission, so I now appealed to Cæsar.

The courteous dignitary at once wrote me the necessary order and signed it. He sent a messenger with me, and for the last time we rapped at the closed door. The attendant was by this time white with anger, but there could be no more demur. The document of authorisation was handed to him by the Mayor's representative, and with the best grace he could muster he allowed me to enter.

I made at once for the head of wax. I found it, and it was well worth all the trouble I had taken to see it. There was a large upright shaft of black marble, and in a niche in the marble was the head. It was somewhat smaller than life-size, and it inclined slightly to the left. The half-closed eyes gave it a dreamy expression, and the face was one of the sweetest ever modelled by man. There was a background of gold, and the drapery around the bust was of terra-cotta.

I spent a long time looking at that exquisite bit of handiwork, which seemed almost living. At

last the silence in the deserted room became oppressive, and I turned to go out.

The door was locked ! The attendant had gone !

In spite of the intervention of high authority, the fellow had taken his revenge. He would say next morning, doubtless, that he had forgotten, or that he thought I had gone, or perhaps he would come back in the night and have me arrested for breaking into the gallery. My former trouble with the police would tell against me. My persistence in seeing the bust would lend colour to the accusation that I had tried to steal a work of art which a princely fortune could not purchase.

I pounded at the door, but it was now after closing-time, and everybody had gone. I then remembered with an inward pang that I had had no lunch.

The eyes of that beautiful modelled face seemed to smile sympathy and consolation, but I was in no mood to be charmed any longer. I threw open the window, and shouted to the passers-by. No one seemed to pay any attention. The people of Lille had got into the habit of minding their own business. Some looked this way and that, as if wondering where the sound came from. Others

glanced up, saw me, and passed on indifferently. It was none of their affair.

Just as despair was seizing me, and the lights of the city began to twinkle forth, I recognised with a thrill of joy a tall military form coming out from under an archway. I never could have believed I should be so glad to see my bitter enemy, the man whom I had promised to fight.

I had nearly yelled "Jones!" before I remembered that Jones was only my own name for him. I shouted, and he looked directly up at me.

"See here," I cried, "I'm locked up in the Wicar Gallery. Couldn't you oblige me by handing me over to the police?"

"I will try to release you," he answered coldly, "but it may be some time before I find the proper official."

He disappeared without undue haste, and it seemed to me that I spent the greater part of the night in that room before I heard the rattling of keys.

"My dear fellow," I gasped, "how can I repay you for this service?"

"By meeting me with your second at Bruges," replied Jones grimly.

CHAPTER V

"THE LAW'S DELAY"

POLICE surveillance has its drawbacks. It gives the police a great deal of trouble. I dislike to be a trouble to anybody, so I shook the dust of Lille from my feet, which action caused quite a fall in landed property, and started for Belgium.

I took a ticket for Courtrai. After a run of eleven miles, we came to a little town called Mouscron, in which the "s" is silent, and so are most of the factories. I was astonished to see so many passengers get out at such a small place as Mouscron, especially as the "s" was silent. However, I considered it none of my business, and as I had a comfortable compartment to myself I sat and smoked. After a long time a guard came along, and on seeing me was filled with the wildest excitement. He motioned me out of the carriage, and when he looked at my ticket became even more excited than before.

On alighting, I saw that everyone had got into another train which was just about to start. I understood the situation in a moment, and wondered at my stupidity in not recognising it before. We had crossed the Belgian frontier, and Mouscron, of the silent " s," was the station where all baggage was examined.

My luggage, as I mentioned before, consisted of my camera and my tripod. The one was slung over my shoulder, and the other I carried in my hand. Then started a wild race for the Belgian train. But when the guard saw that I was making for the train instead of for the custom-house, he yelled—

" Non, non ! La Douane ! La Douane ! "

" Hang the Douane ! " I shouted back, and ran faster than ever.

The guard gave the alarm, and the customs service of Belgium set out to intercept the smuggler. I jumped on the train just as it started. The cars are something after the American fashion, with a platform at each end. When the doors are closed, however, you cannot get into the carriage. Happily the door was open, and the next instant I was inside, and seated by my enemy Jones.

" Hello, old fellow ! " I said in surprise. " How's things ? "

" Where on earth have you dropped from ? " he cried, forgetting his usual hauteur and reserve in his astonishment at my sudden arrival.

" I didn't know that everybody had to change here," I explained frankly, " and so I stayed on the French train until there was barely time to catch this one."

" Then you haven't passed the customs inspection ? "

" Not an inspect. I bolted for it. The guard and the greater part of the customs service were after me, but I beat 'em. Oh, I'm great when it comes to a foot-race."

" You beat them ? " There was no mistaking the horror in Jones's voice. " Good gracious ! You will excuse me if I repeat what I have had occasion to remark before, that you are the most consummate idiot I ever had the pleasure of meeting. Escape them ? You will be arrested at our first stopping-place and lodged in prison. No ; by Jove, they aren't going to wait for that : they are stopping the train now ! "

It was only too true. The signal had been set

against the train the moment the pursuing officials saw I was too fast for them. The train was gradually slowing up.

"Well, I have nothing but this camera, which would pass inspection anyhow."

"That will not make the slightest difference," said Jones severely. "But I presume you may as well go to prison now as later on. You seem resolved to get there, if perseverance in wrong-doing can accomplish it. Is that little box all you have?"

"That, and the tripod here."

"Do you object to falsifying a bit?"

"Not in the least—on such an occasion."

"I thought not. Well, I do on any occasion. Still, I will give you every facility. In this bag I have a few collars and odd things, which I can easily put in my portmanteau. Meanwhile hide that tripod in another part of the carriage. I think the rest of the carriage is empty."

I placed the tripod under a remote seat, and came back.

Jones had emptied his little valise, and into it I jammed my camera and the box. He closed and locked the bag, and by this time the train was in Mouscron Station again.

Three customs officers and the guard boarded our carriage. The guard pointed me out as the delinquent. Still, I could see he was not quite as confident as he thought he would be, for I had taken off my overcoat. I looked up at the guard with astonishment.

The chief *douanier* addressed me in polite but firm tones. What he said, being in French, made no impression on me. For the second time Jones became my interpreter.

"He says," translated Jones, "that you came on here with a small box and a long cane."

"Kindly tell him," I replied, "that I have no baggage, and carry no cane. That, by the way, is true; for a tripod is not a cane, and a camera is not baggage."

"He wants to know when you came on the train."

"Inform him that I came on after you, which is also correct, and that we have travelled together from London."

The officers seemed puzzled. Then they made a rapid examination of the carriage.

"The guard is saying," whispered Jones to me, "that you had a ticket for Courtrai. Did he see your ticket?"

"Yes," I answered.

"Then you had better exchange with me. Mine is for Bruges."

The exchange was quickly made.

The four men came back after an ineffectual search.

"He wants to see your ticket," said Jones, interpreting the *douanier's* remark.

I showed it to him at once, and that settled the matter. They apologised profoundly, and left the train, which now began to make up for lost time.

"George Washington!" I cried. "That was a narrow escape. Allow me to say that you are a brick."

"Permit me to repeat my former opinion of you," said Jones, without emotion, "and to say that you have not escaped."

"Do you think not?"

"I am perfectly sure of it," said Jones, with conviction. "They will set the telegraph in action, and you will be watched for at every station."

"I don't think so," said I. "They may watch for me at Courtrai, but nowhere else."

"Perhaps you are right," conceded my companion. "Do you stop at Courtrai?"

"Yes; for twenty-five minutes. That is the length of time one must wait for the train to Bruges."

"Very well, then. If you can tell me the name of the hotel at which you intend to stop in Bruges, I will take on with me your camera and the tripod, and leave them for you at your hotel."

"I could not think of troubling you more than I have done already," I protested. "I am now very deeply in your debt."

"I do it from an entirely selfish motive," Jones assured me coldly. "I am anxious to meet you at Bruges, and would do anything which would ensure your presence there."

"Oh! Well, in that case, I shall be extremely grateful if you will take charge of my photographing apparatus. I intend to make the Hôtel de l'Univers my headquarters while I remain in Bruges."

"Very good. I shall undertake to deliver your belongings at that address."

After this Jones spoke no more.

The approach to Courtrai was noticeable by reason of the broad fields covered with bleaching linen that we passed. The place is famous for its

table linen and its lace. The town has about thirty-five thousand inhabitants, and more than six thousand women are employed in the making of linen and lace. It is not an industry distinguished for haste or hustle, because the Courtrai flax, when it has been sunned and dried, is stored away for a year, before its preparation can be gone on with. At the end of twelve months it is taken out, and soaked in the waters of the river Lys, on which Courtrai is situated, and then turned over to the manufactories.

"Court*ree*! Court*ree*!" shouted the guard, as we stopped in the dark station.

I had twenty-five minutes in which to see the town, and I meant to make the best of them. I passed out and gave up my ticket without molestation. A couple of officers were watching, but they did not check me.

There is a square in front of the station, as indeed there is in most Continental towns, and it is paved with little round stones. My guide-book had informed me that the Town Hall contained some notable decorated chimneypieces, which were worthy of a star in the instructive pages, and that upstairs two rows of statuettes, representing the

Virtues and *Vices,* were well worth my attention. I had had enough of pictures and statuary, however, in the Wicar Gallery, so I passed the Town Hall, and also the thirteenth-century Church of Notre Dame, which contains one of Van Dyck's best pictures. After all, I could see pictures in other towns, but Courtrai must be seen on the spot. The town as a whole has rather put aside its historical associations, being a prosperous commercial centre, but there still remain two beautiful old bridge towers, and these, although my guide-book dismissed them in a scant line, I determined to see. They were very worthy of the attention, but I would have liked to see those quaint extinguisher-roofed towers, their tops pierced with ancient windows, silhouetted against a moon-lit sky.

In the busy modernised streets it was difficult to associate Courtrai with the famous Battle of Spurs, but the antique bridge towers seemed to typify the dogged, sturdy qualities of the weavers from Ghent and Bruges who, under the walls of Courtrai, in 1302, defeated a French army. The French lost over twelve hundred knights and several thousand soldiers, and after the battle the triumphant weavers

collected no less than seven hundred golden spurs, which were worn only by French knights. These trophies they hung up in a monastery church, but the church is destroyed, and the Battle of Spurs is commemorated nowadays by a small chapel on the centre of the battlefield, a fine painting by de Keyser in the Museum, and a recently erected monument on one of the boulevards.

I hurried back to the station in time to buy a ticket to Bruges, but when I went on to the platform I was astonished to see Jones sitting on a bench, looking somewhat disconsolate.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Why did you not go on to Bruges?"

"One reason is that the train we came to Courtrai by does not go any farther. The Bruges train, as you remarked, leaves twenty-five minutes later. I was just thinking of you, for I should like to ask you a question about photography. Is a tripod necessary for the successful prosecution of the art?"

"It is necessary to me," I answered. "Why do you ask?"

"Merely because the customs officers have that one of yours in charge. It was arrested a few

minutes ago. I feel that I have been rather a coward not to claim it, but knowing that you would soon return, I waited to speak to you about it."

" Where is it ? "

" There, standing against the station wall."

" By George ! " I said, under my breath. " It is tempting, isn't it ? "

" I think," said Jones shrewdly, " that it was probably put in that seemingly unprotected place for the very purpose of tempting the owner to take it."

By this time the train for Bruges was ready, and I took my place in it, but I could not help continuing to gaze at that tripod. I may explain my affection for it by stating that I had had it specially made to my own design, and I did hate to leave it in the hands of Belgian customs officers who would doubtless not appreciate its excellent qualities. It was made without joints, so that when it was closed I could use it as an alpenstock, an extremely convenient arrangement for a traveller like myself.

The guards were hurrying along the train, calling on everyone for Bruges to take their seats. At

this moment I noticed Jones walking along the platform, and the thought struck me that he did not wish to go on the same train that conveyed me. I was reflecting that his dislike to me carried him to extraordinary lengths, when he suddenly tripped, and with an appalling shout he fell at full length.

Evidently he was badly hurt, for he groaned, and lay where he fell without attempting to rise. Everybody rushed around him—passengers, porters, guard, customs officials. Someone raised the fallen man's head and called loudly for brandy. I rushed from my compartment, and made my way through the crowd. I knelt beside the unconscious man, and cried—

"Are you badly hurt? Do you recognise me?"

The left eye of Jones opened slightly. He hissed through his set teeth—

"*Go and steal your tripod, you blockhead!*"

I backed out of the crowd as quietly as I could. The next instant I had secured my tripod, and managed to conceal it beneath a seat in the train, then I joined the crowd again. Jones had recovered rapidly, and was now on his feet, supported by sympathetic *douaniers*. They helped him into

the train. I followed, and to his evident annoyance took a seat beside him.

"You must have hurt yourself," I said.

"Not in the slightest, I assure you," said Jones coldly. "Did you get it?"

"Yes," I answered, "and I am extremely grateful to you."

Jones seemed to feel ashamed of his good-natured assistance, for he rose, passed down the carriage, and went out. I tried to get to my own coach, but the door to the next car was locked. Fortunately, I had not shut the door of the carriage I had left. It was now raining hard, and I was very glad to get into shelter again, for the night was dark and chilly.

About half an hour later I heard, or fancied I heard, someone rapping at the farther door. I went forward and opened it. The doors can all be opened from inside. I found poor Jones, covered with cinders, and dripping wet. He had gone out, like myself, but, less fortunate than I had been, could neither go farther nor get back.

"I am very much obliged," he said, shaking himself.

"I am afraid this won't count on my side of

the balance-sheet," I remarked. "I suppose you went out to avoid me?"

"Not at all. My luggage is in the forward carriage," he replied.

"Then let us see how we stand," I said thoughtfully. "That affair at Armentières was one, and this makes two, on my side. Then the photographing incident and the gallery incident at Lille are two items to *your* credit. The customs incident makes three, and the tripod rescue four, which is just twice as many as I can claim. I am deeply in your debt, you see. Say, don't you want to borrow money, or something?"

"I will take a cigarette, if you please," he agreed, with unusual mildness.

"Thanks; that reduces the burden a trifle."

"How do you intend to get your tripod out of the station when we arrive at Bruges?" asked Jones presently, as though the problem had been puzzling him.

"I've been thinking about that," I answered. "If I could only get to the carriage where it is hidden, I think I would pitch it out of the window when the train is near Bruges, then go back and look for it in the morning. But then it is so con-

foundedly dark to-night that I should never find the place again."

" I wouldn't jeopardise my liberty for a thing like that, if I were you. After all, you can buy another in Brussels, or probably in Bruges."

" Not one like that," I replied regretfully, resolved not to abandon it without another attempt.

Here the guard came in and told us that in a few minutes we should be at Bruges. I asked him to let me into the next coach, which he did.

The tripod was about as tall as myself. It spread out into three legs, and came together, as I have said, in one piece. I was alone in the carriage. I threw off my coat and waistcoat, and ran the tripod down my trousers leg into my boot. Then I put on my coat and waistcoat again, and there I was! The tripod was concealed, but I was a hopeless cripple.

When I limped off the train, Jones realised at once what had been done, and for the first time during our acquaintance I saw a grim smile on his face.

" Here," he said, " take my cane. It will help out the illusion."

So, leaning on the stick, I limped slowly past

the watchers at the gate, and was safely out on the inevitable square in front of the picturesque station of Bruges.

I thanked Jones heartily as I gave him back his cane and took possession of my camera.

" Won't to-day's experiences make any difference to our duel ? " I said.

" My second will wait on you the day after to-morrow," said Jones, raising his hat.

CHAPTER VI

"IN BRUGES TOWN"

THE Hôtel de l'Univers faces the station square, and stands opposite to the cathedral-like structure of the station itself. I secured a room without any difficulty, and in it I locked away my precious camera and the valuable tripod. If the resplendent porter in the hall noticed that although when I entered I was almost too lame to walk as far as the lift, a few minutes later I came running jauntily down the stairway, he did not betray astonishment or make any comment. Still, I imagine if the hall porter in such an hotel were to make inquiries into the incomprehensible actions of the foreigners who enter the big main doors of his tavern, he would have very little time to attend to anything else.

It was an excellent dinner they provided for me, and after enjoying it I started out to see what I could of the old town in the darkness.

The rain had stopped, but the night was very black.

A great bell was tolling, and I felt sure that it was the bell on the celebrated tower of Bruges.

Having studied carefully beforehand the map of Bruges, I knew which direction to follow in search of the Belfry, and proceeded at once down the Rue Sud du Sablon. The air vibrated with the notes of that solemn, deep-toned bell. The sound dominated the town. The dark, narrow, quaint streets, and the general air that Bruges wears of belonging to a past age; the clatter every now and then of wooden shoes, the echo of my own footsteps as I passed through grass-grown ways, and always the solemn, measured music of that sonorous bell, made a deep impression on me.

The women in Bruges wear black cloaks that are also hoods, which completely envelop the figure from head to foot, and as they passed silently, seeming to shrink close to the wall, they gave the idea of being the ghosts of departed nuns, revisiting their haunts in the dead town.

Longfellow's lines should have occurred to me

at the time, but as a matter of fact I looked them up afterwards.

"In the ancient town of Bruges,
In the quaint old Flemish city,
As the evening shades descended,
Low and loud and sweetly blended,
Low at times and loud at times,
And changing like a poet's rhymes,
Rang the beautiful wild chimes
From the Belfry in the Market
Of the ancient Town of Bruges.

Then, with deep, sonorous clangour
Calmly answering their sweet anger,
When the wrangling bells had ended,
Slowly struck the clock eleven,
And, from out the silent heaven,
Silence on the town descended."

The bell I speak of was not striking eleven. It had tolled at least eleven times eleven since I came out, and it still kept on. When I came to the small square into which the street entered, I found that I was hearing, not the bell of the tower, but the bell of the Cathedral. The huge bulk of this building rose rather like a castle than a sacred edifice against the dark sky, and it looked far more imposing and picturesque thus silhouetted than it did when I saw it later in daylight. I

paused at the corner, listening to the wonderful note of St. Sauver's great bell, and for a full minute after the bell ceased, the still air seemed to quiver with the sound that had thrilled it.

I had intended to walk as far as the Halles, and take a look at the Belfry, but instead I turned into the Rue du St. Esprit, and came to a large church, which I found afterwards to be Notre Dame, another Gothic structure dating from the thirteenth century.

The streets were very silent and deserted, and seemed more so than ever since the Cathedral bell ceased ringing. I was just wondering which turn I should take next, when suddenly on the still night rang out a cry for help, and then another less distinct, as though the caller's voice were being smothered. I ran at full speed down the street, which here had an easy descent, and in an opening where there was a bridge, I saw dimly a number of men struggling.

There was no cry to be heard now, and they appeared to be trying to throw someone over into the canal. As I rushed on I gave a wild Comanche yell, which I had learned from a man who had heard it from the lips of Artemus Ward. The

effect was truly terrifying. Buffalo Bill had never visited Bruges, and it was the first time such a cry had ever startled that mediæval town.

The moment they heard the Indian war-whoop those men scattered as if by magic, and disappeared in any direction but the street down which I was running. Only one remained, and as I came nearer I recognised the tall form of Jones leaning against the parapet of the bridge. He was panting, and for several moments was unable to speak. When he regained his breath, he said gaspingly—

"By Jove! That was a regular London garrotte! If the descriptions I have heard of it are reliable, that was the real thing."

"Have they hurt you?" I asked anxiously.

"I think not. I feel rather exhausted, but nothing more. Those ruffians took me completely unawares. I was leaning over the parapet when one of them threw his arm round my neck, and it flashed across me that this was the sort of thing that one associated with the Thames Embankment in days gone by. I am generally able to defend myself, but I quickly realised that I was helpless, and I cried out once or twice; but my man knew his business, and soon stopped that."

"Did they take your money?"

Jones felt in his inner breast-pocket, then went through his other pockets.

"I imagine there was no time for them to make a search," said Jones. "You came on the scene so promptly and so unexpectedly that they were nonplussed."

"I did not know the Belgians went in for that sort of thing," I remarked.

"Oh, they weren't Belgians," said Jones confidently. "That was the grip of a genuine London hooligan. Besides, one of the men said in good Whitechapel English, 'Wring 'is bloomin' neck.'"

"Well, Belgians or British," said I, "this doesn't seem to me a particularly healthy spot for gentle conversation, and I propose we move on. Where are you staying?"

"At the Grand Hotel. It is a quiet place that is rather a favourite with English people."

"I thought that Englishmen generally avoided hotels frequented by their countrymen."

"They do. But at this season of the year there are few travelling, and I am the only Englishman staying at the Grand."

We walked together to his hotel, which was

farther down town than mine. As we stood at the door, I said—

"Look here. Can't we have that fight to-morrow? I want to get it over, receive your apology, and then be free to meet as friends, since we seem destined to meet pretty frequently. Doesn't it strike you that we need each other too much to have such a thing as a duel hanging over us in this sort of Damocles way? Let's get it over and done with."

"Sir, to-morrow is Sunday," said Jones rebukingly.

"By George, so it is! How a person does lose track of Sunday on the Continent! Still, I don't think it is any worse to murder a man on Sunday than on, say, Thursday, or even Friday."

"Who talks of murder?" demanded Jones icily.

"You do, for one," I returned. "You have been yearning to murder me ever since we left Victoria Station."

"My dear sir, you are taking an offensive tone again," remarked Jones, with great calmness. "That is a matter which must be left to our seconds. I refuse to discuss the matter further."

"But I insist on discussing it. I want the absurd quarrel abandoned."

"Sir, if you continue in that strain," said Jones coolly, "you will lead me reluctantly to the opinion that you are a coward."

"A coward?" I echoed. "Good gracious! Do you mean to say you are finding that out only at this late hour? Why, of course I'm a coward. I don't know at the moment just how far my cowardice will lead me. I am afraid I shall run when we reach the field of honour. It may even make me apologise to you, which would be still worse. But the principal thing that strikes me is the utter futility of our dispute."

My airy way of treating the subject seemed to annoy Jones extremely.

"I am sorry that I cannot take your view of it," he said.

"Oh, you aren't half so sorry as I am," I protested, with deep sincerity. "Now, those fellows on the bridge who tried to throw you over into the canal were not nearly as criminal as we propose to make ourselves, for they had a definite object in view, whatever it was. They had sense on their side; we have none. They had a purpose;

we have none. By the way, what would you say to a garrotting match? That would be something new in the duelling line."

But Jones would not deign to answer my suggestion.

"Allow me, sir, to wish you good-night," he said stiffly, and with that he turned and walked into his hotel.

I walked somewhat dejectedly back to mine. I had lost my interest in wandering among deserted streets for the time being, so I sought the informative head porter, and asked whether there were any theatres in Bruges. He said there were, but added the interesting information that they were closed on Saturday nights, but would be open on Sunday.

He then asked me to put down some particulars about myself in a book that he kept for such a purpose. He excused the searching nature of the inquiries by saying that the police required him to make a return of all the information that had to be entered in the book. I looked at the headings printed above the columns in which I must set down my replies, and understood at once why there were so few police about to protect wandering

strangers like Jones. They spend their time trying to keep track of the family histories furnished to them by the hotel-keepers of Bruges. Here, for instance, are a few of the points on which they desired me to enlighten them :—

"Nom et prénoms. Profession. Age. De naissance. De domicile. Autorité qui a delivré le passeport. Date du passeport. Destination indiquée dans le passeport. Lieu d'où viennent les voyageurs, lieu où ils se rendent et l'époque présumée de leur départ. Autorité qui a visé le passeport. Hotels ou auberges où ils sont déclaré logé. Date d'entrée. Date de sortie. Observations."

To a person entirely ignorant of the French language this was an appalling inquisition, and to set it before him when he came in tired after an exciting evening added to its difficulties. The clerk spoke such poor English that he was unable to assist me to any great extent. So I set down the particulars of what I could make out easily, and for the rest I contented myself with writing down "yes" or "no," taking care to be impartial, by counting the number of negatives and affirmatives, and seeing that they were equal. I did not want either the noes or the ayes to have it, so I think I

gave it to the Belgians square between the nose and the eyes. Under the head of "Observations" I wrote that if they really wanted my opinion about the matter, this sort of thing was the silliest sort of thing that I had yet come across, but I begged the king not to change it on my account if it provided the officials with something to do.

Then I left the hotel staff to make what it could of my replies, and went to bed. I was awakened early in the morning by a loud rapping at the door. One of the inconveniences of an hotel near a station is the "knocking-up" that goes on in the early hours. People going on by the first trains next day stay at these handy hotels, and are waked betimes, but I had no train to catch, and had left no orders for being called. Evidently they had mistaken the number of the room, and were waking the wrong person.

I shouted to the insistent knocker to go away, but his raps became more peremptory. I tried burying my head in the clothes, that I might go to sleep again, and allow the energetic person outside my door to grow tired of his vain efforts.

The bedclothes in a foreign hotel, however, are not adapted for deadening sound, and finding I

could stand the racket no longer I jumped up, and opened the door.

Outside stood the proprietor of the hotel, and with him a couple of officers. The proprietor, with the utmost politeness, explained that I was arrested.

" What for ? " I asked.

They refused to tell me. I was to accompany the officers, and to ask no questions. It was a serious charge, they admitted, but they would say no more about it.

Had the *douaniers* traced me, I wondered ? I looked round hastily, but camera and tripod were concealed. I had taken the precaution of hiding them the evening before, and evidently the officers had no intention of looking for them. Perhaps some official with a deficient sense of humour had been studying my entries in the hotel register ?

As a matter of fact I soon discovered that both my suppositions were very wide of the mark. I was arrested for robbery and attempted murder !

CHAPTER VII

THE GENTLEMAN'S NAME

For robbery and attempted murder! I could easily understand how they might make out the stealing of my own tripod to be a robbery, but where did the attempted murder come in? The remarks on the hotel register could hardly be construed into high treason; still, you never can tell what an entirely innocent act may be construed into when it comes before a Continental court.

As I sat in custody that morning, pondering over the unfortunate affair, I began to see through it all. I remembered my conversation the previous evening with Jones, at the portal of the Grand Hotel. People had been passing and repassing as we talked, and I had spoken, as I usually do, without much restraint. It flashed across my mind that I had accused Jones of being a murderer, or at least of contemplating something of that sort, and

I had admitted that in giving way to his insane idea I was no better than a murderer myself.

I resolved to send for Jones if they would allow me to, although I surmised that it was more than likely he was under arrest himself. The first thing, however, was to get an interpreter. I managed to convey this wish to the authorities, and after a time the interpreter came.

" Will you kindly tell me of what I am accused ? " was my opening demand.

The interpreter seemed somewhat embarrassed, and tried to turn the subject. Finding that I was persistent, he consulted with the officials who were listening to our conversation, and then reiterated the charge. I was arrested and held for robbery and attempted murder.

" Would it be possible for me to get permission to send for a friend ? " I asked.

" Is your friend in Bruges ? "

" Yes."

" Is he an Englishman ? "

" Yes."

" What is his name ? "

By George, they had me there ! What *was* his name ? I said that I could not tell.

The men looked at me and at each other significantly. It was manifestly an evidence of guilt that I had a friend and refused to reveal his name.

"Why do you refuse to tell us the name of your friend?" asked the interpreter.

"For the very simple reason that I do not know what his name is," said I.

This seemed, not unnaturally, to strike the august tribunal as altogether too thin. That a man should have a friend and not know his name was manifestly ridiculous.

"He is staying at the Grand Hotel," I said. "If you will take a letter to him there, I will write it at once."

Somewhat dubiously I was given permission to communicate with my nameless friend. I wrote the letter, put it in an envelope which I sealed and addressed, then handed it to the interpreter. Quite calmly he read aloud the superscription—

"THE ENGLISHMAN who came from Lille on Saturday night,
Grand Hôtel du Commerce,
Bruges."

That puzzled them, but did not seem incriminating. Next they proceeded to tear open the envelope

and withdraw the letter, which the interpreter translated, not without difficulty, for its style was not modelled on the exercises in an English-French grammar-book. It said—

"DEAR SIR,—I was arrested before I was rightly awake this morning, on the charges of murder, slander, assault and battery, arson, theft, libel and a few more things, and am now in custody. I haven't the least idea who I have murdered or what I have stolen, so I wish you would return with the bearer of this note, and see if you can do anything.

"I must confess I was disappointed that you did not turn up the moment I got into trouble, as you usually do. However, better late than never! And please do remember that I have not had my breakfast, while that fellow at the Universe will very likely charge me for it.—Yours truly,

"THE AMERICAN."

When the interpreter finished this letter, he had the kindness to point out that I was mistaken in the number of indictments I had made against myself. He had the honour of assuring me that the case was not really so bad as all that. I was merely up to answer a charge of attempted murder and successful robbery.

After consulting together, they seemed to agree that it was best to send the letter, and a couple of officers went along with it, so that if my accomplice attempted to escape, and if the letter, as they strongly suspected, was merely a blind, to give him a hint to get off, the design would be frustrated.

I waited for over an hour, and then in came Jones with the messenger and the two officers. Evidently he had not been arrested.

"Ah!" said the head official, a smile of recognition illumining his severe face. "Here is the accuser!"

"Oh, this is a ridiculous mistake!" cried Jones, cutting short the flowery greeting the official was just beginning. "This gentleman, so far from being one of those who robbed me, was the person who rescued me from the marauders."

Then, turning to me, he explained—

"You see, last night, after you left me, I gave information of the attempt to the police, and told them I had been robbed by people who spoke English. You being the only other English-speaking arrival they could trace, they promptly arrested you. I am extremely sorry to have been the cause of any inconvenience to you."

"Oh, don't mention it," I said cheerfully. "I am more than relieved to find that it is nothing serious. I was afraid they had got on to some other facts of my career with which you are familiar."

The authorities were convinced of my innocence far more quickly than I could have imagined possible, and they apologised profoundly and at great length for having detained me.

Jones and I walked out together. He seemed very much annoyed that what he was pleased to call his heedlessness had been the cause of my arrest.

"Come and breakfast with me," he invited, more cordially than he had before spoken to me.

I shook my head.

"I am sorry," I told him, "but I cannot do it. I am rather peculiar about some things, and hate to depart from old habits. It has been my invariable rule that when I am to kill a man I never breakfast with him the day before."

Jones frowned. He never seemed to relish any attempted jocularity on the serious subject of duelling. He made no answer to my remarks, and we walked together into the Grand Place, guarded by that celebrated Belfry.

"Look here, old man," I began again. "I've thought of a brilliant scheme for the coming conflict. Let us fight it out on the battlefield of Waterloo. It isn't so very far from here. Suppose we postpone our combat until we get to Brussels, and then make the field ever memorable by our gory struggle. I tell you, when we get going, the French and English won't be in it compared with our fight. How does the idea strike you?"

"I don't suppose you are serious," said Jones solemnly, "but if you are, I may say that I have other arrangements. My cousin is coming from Lille to-morrow to attend to the preliminaries."

"Well, we could still have it on the battlefield," I urged. "There are no tourists there at this time of year. We should have it all to ourselves. Now, I have some original ideas that we could put into practice. One of us could go up to the top of the mound, and the other hug the base, one firing down and the other firing up. We could toss to see who should do the climbing. We could take a hundred cartridges each, and fire until they were exhausted, and honour was satisfied. Or you could take one side of the pyramid and I the other, and at the firing of a pistol we could

both begin to stalk each other. If I caught sight of your coat-tails at one corner as I came round another, I would blaze away. Just imagine what a fusillade there would be if we both met at one corner! Climbing over the mound would be prohibited, and the fellow that ran more than a rod from the pyramid would be declared out. Don't you think that's a great scheme?"

"My dear sir," began Jones, speaking very slowly and impressively, "the incident of this morning has given me great vexation. I must confess, however, that your manner of talking is doing much to mitigate the regret that I felt at being the cause of annoyance to you. I may say that I find it extremely difficult to restrain my temper while you speak in the way you are doing."

"Then, hang it, *don't* restrain it! That's the great fault I find with you. You restrain too much. You would be ten times more of a man if you would get humanly angry now and then. You ought to practise swearing a little; not too much, you know, but just enough to counteract that cold blood-thirstiness of yours. A mitigated profanity would be the making of you, I am sure."

Jones went on, more coldly, even, than before—

"I was going to say, when you interrupted me just now, that it is entirely irregular for either of us to talk about the unfortunate business to which you have alluded. All that must be left to our seconds. If you have any particular wishes on the subject, the proper person to whom they should be expressed is the friend you choose to represent you. You must not deal personally in the matter either with my second or myself. My cousin, whom you met at Lille on this matter, will be instructed by me to allow anything possible in such a case, consistent, of course, with dignity and gentlemanly usage.

"I am very sorry to say this, as it has a certain appearance of giving you a lecture on etiquette, but I mean it in no such offensive sense, and I assure you that the irregularity of a conversation on such a topic between us is extremely irritating to me."

We said nothing further until we reached the door of his hotel, where he again extended his invitation to breakfast. I once more refused the invitation, and thus we parted.

As I walked alone along the Rue St. Jacques, I began to think seriously over the situation. I had

quite made up my mind not to fight, and yet circumstances were gathering round me in such a way that for the first time the realisation was borne in upon me that I might perhaps be forced to meet the man. Much as I disliked this overbearing stranger I called Jones, I found that there was growing up in my mind, in spite of myself, a certain respect for him. I had never before met a man who seriously believed in duelling, and at first the idea seemed so absurd that I thought it only required laughing at to make it disappear altogether.

Now the situation had changed. There was no question that Jones intended to fight me, or compel me to apologise to him. I did not want to do either, nor did I want to run away, a course of action always open to me. I began to feel the need of some sensible man to consult with.

When I had finished my *petit déjeuner* of rolls and coffee on Monday morning, the waiter told me there was a gentleman wishing to see me. I went into the smoking-room, and found there the man I had met for a few moments at Lille. He rose when I entered, and said—

"I presume I do not need an introduction to

you. I had the pleasure of meeting you a few days ago. Have you a friend in Bruges to whom you could refer me, so that we may arrange matters with as little delay as possible ? "

" Are you in a hurry ? " I asked.

" Oh, certainly not ! I enjoy a good deal of leisure, and I shall be spending some days in Bruges. As a matter of fact, my cousin has invited me to stay with him. But he seems anxious to have this little affair settled as soon as possible, don't you know, and I presume that an early meeting would be best for all concerned. Still, we are willing to wait your convenience."

" Well," I returned, with determination, " I have thought over this matter a great deal, and there is one point on which I must insist. I will not fight with a man whose name I do not know. Your cousin must send me his card before I proceed to make any preparations whatever."

" I am afraid he will not consent to that," said my visitor doubtfully.

" Then I think you must admit that there is no rule in the code that will compel me to meet a man of whose very name I am ignorant ! "

" I think the point you make is quite ad-

missible," conceded the other, as though that view of the matter had never occurred to him before. "With your permission, I will consult my cousin, and meet you again at whatever hour will suit you best."

"It will not take you long to confer with him," I replied. "I will wait here until you return."

"Very good. Am I to understand that in no circumstances will you meet him unless he gives his name?"

"The giving of a name will not be sufficient," said I, making as much of my advantage as I could. "I must have the card he offered me on the train. Any man may take whatever name suits him for an affair of this kind."

The other coloured slightly.

"I am sorry that you should say that," he said. "However, I will let you know as quickly as possible what my cousin has to say."

With that he bowed stiffly, and left the room.

About half an hour later he returned.

"My cousin," he began, "regrets that you insist on the condition you have mentioned, but at the same time he fully recognises your right to do so.

He has therefore authorised me to present his card to you."

With this he placed before me on the table a bit of cardboard.

I picked it up, and at first could hardly believe the evidence of my eyes, but a second glance showed that there was no doubt whatever about it.

The name on the card was—"MR. HENRY JONES"!

CHAPTER VIII

A CLERICAL ERROR

When I had in a measure recovered from my astonishment at finding that the man I had mentally named "Jones" was really Jones, I looked up at his cousin and said—

"Might I ask what your own name is?"

"Certainly," he replied pleasantly. "My name is Derwent."

"I think you said, Mr. Derwent, that you are going to remain some days in Bruges?"

"That is my intention."

"Then I should like to have as much time as you can conveniently allow me. I do not know anybody in Bruges, and I may have some difficulty in finding a second to support me when our meeting takes place."

Derwent bowed his acquiescence.

"And you will communicate with me when you are ready?" he asked.

"I will. You are staying at the Grand Hotel with your cousin, I presume?"

"I am."

"Very well. I wish you good-day, Mr. Derwent."

I sat there some minutes after he had gone, Jones's card in my hand, thinking over the situation. Thinking did not make it any better, so I rose, and said to myself—

"Damme!"

This was not the celebrated exclamation of Sir Joseph Porter, although it is spelled like it. It is the name of a poor but honest Belgian town situated about an hour's ride to the north-east of Bruges. It is seldom visited by anybody, for it contains little to interest the average tourist.

Venice has been called the Bride of the Sea. Damme was also once the bride of the sea, but she has been deserted by her husband.

I went out and bargained with a cabman to take me to Damme. That is to say, I told him in excellent French the number of francs I would pay, holding up at the same time as many fingers as I would pay francs. I presume the lengthy and eloquent answer he made was in praise of my knowledge of the language, so I repeated my

accomplishment, and received more commendation. At last, however, the man seemed to think he had listened to me as often as courtesy demanded, and with a nod of his head, he climbed to his seat on the box, and motioned to me to enter the carriage.

We passed through the town of Bruges, and crossed the canal at the Porte de Damme, and out into the level country. Just as Lille is completely surrounded by brick and stone, so is Bruges completely encircled by water. Canals not only surround the town, but wherever you go in the city you see them. Therefore Bruges contains more bridges to the square foot than any other place I know, unless it is Venice or Amsterdam. These bridges give the city its name, for the Flemish title "Brugge" means "bridges."

We found Damme where the sea had left it, some six or seven miles inland. There was a big, unfinished church, a statue, and some picturesquely restored halles. The place once had been busy, and was then strongly fortified. In the fifteenth century the sea began to leave it, and as a seaport is of very little use unless the sea is somewhere near at hand, the place languished. The fortifica-

tions crumbled down, and now the grass grew in the streets.

I did not enjoy the Damme visit as much as I thought I should. As the afternoon wore on, rain began to fall, and made the life of a sightseer a burden to him.

As we went back I began to long for Jones, and I wondered what new scrape he had got into during my absence. I was not kept long in suspense. About a mile from Damme I saw a man sitting by the roadside, and as we neared him I recognised the well-known form of my enemy. The thought flashed across my mind that Jones must be crazy. No sane man would sit on the damp roadside in a drizzle of rain in the depth of winter.

As we came up to him, I cried—

"Hello, Jones! Are you enjoying yourself?"

"I have seen happier moments," admitted the Englishman frankly.

"What is the trouble?"

"About half an hour ago I foolishly tried to jump across this ditch. I have either sprained my ankle badly, or I have broken it."

I regret to say that a feeling of joy stole over me at this announcement. If it was a fracture,

the duel would be off until I got out of Belgium, at least, and in England the thing would be impossible, even if I did meet Jones in London, which was very improbable.

"You will let me take you to Bruges and to your hotel?" I asked, getting out to assist him.

He tried to rise unaided, but immediately sank down again. I helped him to a place in the carriage. Luckily for him, the Belgian road was a smooth one, and we travelled easily.

Jones did not seem inclined for conversation, so I started to speak.

"I want to apologise to you," I began.

"Ah!" cried Jones, looking up quickly.

"—for not having thought to offer you a loan yesterday."

"Oh," said Jones, looking down at his foot again.

"You gave me to understand," I went on, "that the robbers had not taken your pocket-book. From the charge of robbery you preferred, I gather that they did."

"Yes; they took my money," he admitted.

"Well, in that case you must be out of cash."

"Oh, I am not inconvenienced at all. I wired

to London for more money, and I expect it here to-night or to-morrow—most likely to-morrow. If I cared to borrow money I could easily do so, but I always dislike taking a loan, even from a friend."

"And more so from an enemy, I suppose?"

"I am not a believer in either borrowing or lending," answered Jones evasively.

"How did you happen to be out this way?" I asked, seeing that it would be better to waive the question of a loan at present.

"My intention was to visit Damme," he said. "Not having any money to spare, I thought I would walk there, though as a matter of fact I should rather prefer walking in any case. I came alone, because my cousin, who has lived for some time on the Continent, has got out of English habits, and does not like walking. I have spent a good deal of time around Rye and Winchelsea, on the south coast of England. Those two towns, as perhaps you know, were left by the sea in a somewhat similar way to Damme, so I was interested in the matter, and walked out to see the town—at least, I began to walk with that intention."

"Now, that is curious," said I. "You are

interested in Damme because you know of some English towns in a like situation. I am interested in Damme because I know some American cities that I expect will be in the same situation before many years. When the Niagara Falls creep up a little farther and suddenly make a river of Lake Erie, Toledo, Cleveland, and Buffalo will share the fate of Damme."

Mr. Jones said it was quite remarkable, but I saw that his foot pained him to such an extent that he did not care to talk.

I helped him out when we reached the Grand Hotel, to the great astonishment of Mr. Derwent, who was standing in the doorway, looking languidly at the falling rain. I assisted Jones as far as his own room, and then turned away to seek my own hotel. Derwent came running after me.

"I say," he cried, "have you made it all up?"

"No; we haven't spoken about the matter."

"Then it is still on?"

"I believe so."

"Really? It seems to me, you know, that you are on remarkably good terms for men who talk of cutting each other's throats, don't you know."

"We have the most profound respect for one another," I assured him.

"Have you really? Devilish strange that, don't you know. But, I say, have you spoken to your second yet?"

"No; I haven't found one up to the present time."

"Now, I hope you won't think me in an undue hurry, but I should like to have this little affair settled, don't you know."

"Why, your cousin will not be able to fight, or probably even move from his room, for days to come," I reminded him.

"Oh, I've known men fight on crutches," he replied.

"Then they were more anxious to fight than I am."

"I was going to suggest," he went on quickly, "—just thought of it, in fact, the moment after I parted from you—always do think of things when it is too late to say them, you know,—that it would not be half a bad idea if you applied to the American Consul. Of course there must be a consul in a place like Bruges. Your hotel proprietor would tell you, perhaps, the address of the American Consulate."

"Possibly. All the same, it is no part of the duty of an American Consul to act as second in a duel."

"Oh, I quite understand that; but then, don't you see, he might introduce you to someone who would."

"Well, I'll see about it," I promised him.

"Thanks awfully," he murmured, as though I had done him a personal favour. "By the way, do you think my cousin is badly hurt?"

"Well, he seemed in a great deal of pain. I should send for a doctor at once, if I were you."

"Oh, I have done that already."

"Well, good-day to you."

When I got back to the Universe, I called for the man who thought he spoke English.

"Do you know whether there is an American Consul in Bruges?" I asked him.

"Ameerekan? Ah yees! Ameerekans do koom at Brooge. Ah yees."

"No, no: an American *consul*—American *consul*. He must have an office here. A man that Americans go to see, you know."

"Ah yees, I unstan'. De Ameerekan Meenestre!"

"The American Minister is at Brussels. The man that is here is a consul or agent."

"Ah no. De Meenestre, he at Brooge. Ah yees. Brooge beeg ceety—beeg more dan Brussel seex seven hoondred years 'go."

"That was before my time. Anyhow, the Minister is in Brussels now. This man is very likely the Consul, however. Have you his address?"

"Ah yees. Een moment."

Shortly after he returned, and gave me the address of Mr. Dobel, 27 Rue Blank. I obtained directions for finding the street, and set out immediately.

I found Mr. Dobel seated in his library. I judged from the number of books he had around him that he was one of the literary consuls that America sends over to unimportant towns in Europe. It was evident, however, that Mr. Dobel had not yet developed into a Howells or a Bret Harte, for up to that day I had never heard of him. He did not look at all like the typical office-holder. It was impossible to imagine him obtaining his place because he had helped at ward caucuses before elections, or "stood in" with the "boys" while the contest was going on.

"Mr. Dobel," I began, "I have got into a little trouble, and, not knowing anyone in Bruges, I came to you to see if you could help me out."

Mr. Dobel seemed to draw himself into himself. The geniality of his manner faded away as I went on.

"I am very sorry," he said, "but, really, I have so many calls on my resources—I—if you wished advice—or—you see that financially——"

"Oh, it isn't that!" I exclaimed hastily. "I have plenty of money."

"Ah!" said Mr. Dobel, seemingly much relieved, "you see, so many of my countrymen run short of funds that I have found it impossible, much as I would like to assist them, to be able to do so, but——"

"I am sure you must have many calls of that kind."

"I have indeed."

"It was about an entirely different matter that I wished your advice. I have promised to fight a duel to oblige an Englishman."

"To fight a *what*, sir?" cried Mr. Dobel, in open-mouthed astonishment.

"A duel. I want someone to act as my second,

and see fair play. I thought that you might perhaps——"

"That I—that *I*—would assist—would be a second in a *duel*!"

Mr. Dobel rose to his feet, with an expression of the utmost horror on his face.

"Well, I did not expect that you would assist *personally*, you know, but I thought that as you are doubtless out with the boys a good deal, you could introduce me to the right sort of fellow to act as second."

Mr. Dobel's face looked petrified with abhorrence and amazement.

"And what," he gasped, "—and what, might I ask, induced you to come to *me* on such an errand of the devil?"

"You're the American Consul, aren't you?" I questioned, astonished in my turn.

"I am a minister of the Gospel, sir," said Mr. Dobel, with terrible solemnity.

CHAPTER IX

"WAR EVEN TO THE KNIFE"

I WAS shocked to think that I had broached such a subject to a clergyman. To intimate that a man of his calling was in the habit of being out with the boys was bad enough, but practically to ask him to be a second in a duel was worse. I apologised as well as I could, and tried to explain that I thought he was the American Consul in a town where, as I afterwards learnt, there was no American Consul. I remembered when it was too late that the hotel-keeper had said that the man was a minister, but I thought he had meant an official of the government.

All my explanations, however, seemed to make the matter worse, instead of improving it. The gentleman was not to be placated, and the more he thought of the outrage, the more heinous my crime appeared.

I left the house and went directly to the Grand

Hotel, where I found that elegant idler, Mr. Derwent.

"Look here," I said, "I can't get a second in Bruges. I am willing, and even anxious, to fight, and I want to fight right away. Now, I will accept anyone you like to appoint, as second, or we can go to the field with you to second both of us, so long as your principal agrees."

"I am afraid," he replied thoughtfully, "that such a thing would be impossible, don't you know. Still, I think I can find you a second. When I say 'impossible,' I mean that it would never do for me to be second to both of you. That would be in a measure——"

"Acting in a dual capacity?" I suggested. "Just the thing for an occasion like this, I should say."

"Perhaps; but I am afraid etiquette is against it. No; it is out of the question. I will bring a gentleman to your hotel in half an hour, if you are agreeable, and then we can arrange everything.'

"How is your cousin's ankle?"

"A great deal better, thank you," said Derwent. "He only gave it a severe wrench."

"Do you think he will be ready to come out to-morrow?"

"I think so."

"Well, you don't need to bother about bringing your friend to see me. Just arrange everything with him, and let me know the place and the hour. By the way, I have the choice of weapons, I think?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I choose bowie-knives."

"Bowie-knives?"

He pronounced the words as though they belonged to some foreign tongue he had never heard before.

"Yes," I said. "You may either get the implements yourself, or ask my second to do so."

"My dear sir," gasped Derwent, "I never heard of such a thing, and I am sure it is quite irregular. I don't even know what a bowie-knife *is*, to begin with."

"Oh, any knife with a blade, good and sharp, over six inches long, will do. I always fight with bowie-knives."

"Yes, but—really, don't you know, this is quite unusual. I am sure my cousin would never consent to meet you with such weapons."

"My dear sir, let me tell you that gentlemen

of the West have long been accustomed to settle any little difference in this fashion. Of course, I should prefer Indian ponies, and a good rifle, but I am afraid that such things could not be had in Bruges, so in a spirit of accommodation I mention bowie-knives. Still, you might say to Mr. Jones that if he would rather fight with razors I am willing, and I have no doubt he has a couple of good ones with him."

Mr. Derwent looked at me for a moment, as though trying to decide whether my speech was intended seriously, or should be treated as genial persiflage. With obvious reluctance he was forced to the first theory.

"You astonish me!" he said. "Who ever heard of people fighting with razors?"

"It is quite the proper thing among the negroes in the Southern States of America. A fight with good razors is one of the most inspiring sights a man can wish to see. You might put it in that way to your cousin. A policeman is more afraid of a negro armed with a razor than he is of two white men, each having a loaded revolver. Just tell Mr. Jones, however, that it is quite immaterial to me. I will take either bowies or razors, as suits him."

I left Mr. Derwent rather dazed over this proposal, and I said to myself, as I went back to my hotel, that I had put a stop to this absurd encounter.

Just as I was retiring for the night, Mr. Derwent came in, accompanied by a very Frenchy individual, whom he introduced to me as Baron de Bois, an exiled nobleman from the neighbouring republic.

This individual expressed himself as charmed with the prospect of assisting at a duel in which bowie-knives were to be used. It had been his privilege, he said, to be present at many meetings of the kind, both as principal and as second, but he had never yet had the felicity to witness one fought with the bowie-knife.

"Then you spoke to your cousin about the bowies, eh?" I asked Derwent.

"Yes. He prefers them to the razors. Besides, he fears that if his own razors were used for that purpose they would not be very serviceable afterwards for their original purpose. Buttons, you know."

"That *is* an objection. Have you arranged the time and place?"

"Yes. The Baron has promised to be good enough to call for you at six o'clock to-morrow

morning, in a cab that will take you to within walking distance of the place. Are these about the correct style?"

He placed on the table two villainous-looking dirks that made me shudder.

"Well, you can hardly call them bowie-knives, but I suppose they will do."

Derwent noticed the disparagement in my voice, for he explained apologetically—

"They are the only things approximating to a bowie that we could get. They are sharp on both sides, have good points, and the guard protects the hands."

"Bowies have no guards. That is one of their beauties. Still, we shall have to put up with them."

I was called at half-past five next morning, and hurried into my clothes as quickly as I could, after which I swallowed the cup of coffee that had been prepared for me. Was I afraid? Not a bit of it. I had not put my affairs in order, neither had I done any of the usual things that duellists do. I had slept well the night before, and had arisen comparatively untroubled. This was not so much due to my desperate courage, as to the fact that I intended to apologise at the last moment, if I did not

succeed in bluffing Jones—a feat that I began to think I should not accomplish, seeing that he had, like a conjurer, swallowed the knives without a murmur.

I found the Baron waiting for me with a one-horse cab on whose box-seat the driver was dozing in the sharp morning air. The Baron was in high spirits, and was wrapped in a fur-lined overcoat which somehow looked very Parisian. We started down the Rue Sablon, and across the Grand Place, where the bells in the great tower were still ringing the cheery chimes that preceded the solemn striking of six o'clock. It could hardly be called daylight yet. The Baron looked back from the cab window, and said gleefully :

" Ah ha ! We shall be first on the ground. The other cab is following us. I always like to be first on the ground. Cour*aze, mon vieux.*"

" Oh, I'm not afraid," I assured him airily. " I have killed too many men in my career as a journalist to fear a little encounter like this."

We went out into the country by the picturesque gate of Ostend, which stands partly in the water and partly on land, like a small fortress, which it is. After going along the level road for some distance

we told the cabman to wait, and went the rest of the way on foot.

To our astonishment we saw the other two waiting for us. Like typical young Englishmen, they had walked there in the keen morning air.

" My principal wishes to know," said Mr. Derwent, approaching, " whether it is customary to have the face barred against the blows of the knife. If not, he would like to have it understood that the face in each case is not to be touched."

The Baron de Bois looked to me for the etiquette of the situation.

" Here is my chance," said I to myself. " Jones is afraid for his good looks, and I don't blame him."

" I'm sorry," I said aloud, " that I cannot allow such a proviso. In affairs of this kind, where I do not wish to kill outright, it has always been my custom to blind my opponent by an upward or downward slash, as the case may be. I cannot consent to having any portion of the body protected. It would be a gross violation of the code."

The Baron looked delighted at my decision, and nodded his head several times very quickly.

" Now, I say," expostulated Derwent, " that I think this is contrary to all civilised usage. I do not

think you have any precedent for objecting to our proposal."

"My dear sir," broke in the Baron, "with rapiers it is often the case that the face is pierced. The students at Heidelberg always——"

"Derwent!" cried Jones. "Come here a moment."

When the second went to him, I heard Jones say impatiently—

"Don't haggle, please. Let us get to work. It is chilly standing about here."

Mr. Jones took off his coat carefully, placed it, the outside downwards, on the damp grass, put his vest on top of it with equal scrupulousness, and grasped his dagger.

I did the same, flourishing the weapon a little in the air, as though I were used to that sort of thing.

I could not but admire the quiet courage of my enemy. He stood there looking as calm and self-possessed as if he were about to begin a game of tennis. He was a picture of fine physical perfection, and for all he knew he was about to fight a wild Westerner with weapons to which he was entirely unaccustomed, and with which he supposed his adversary to be an expert. He knew that a word

would put an end to it all, but evidently he never for a moment thought of speaking it. He thought that he was in the right, and believed that it was the other man from whom an apology was due. For that idea he was willing to be hacked to pieces. There was no bravado in his manner, nor was there the slightest trace of fear.

" Ready ! " cried the seconds.

I grasped my dagger with a firmer hand, and cleared my throat to begin my apology.

Suddenly the Baron cried out—

" Great heavens, gentlemen, look yonder ! "

CHAPTER X

WHO RUNS AWAY

When the Baron de Bois cried "Look yonder!" hostilities were suspended, and we all looked. This is what we saw.

Another cab was drawn up beside that used by the Baron and myself, and from it issued three policemen, and someone in civilian clothes. As the quartette approached, I recognised the unofficial gentleman as the Mr. Dobel whom I had met a short time before with such unfortunate results.

He had evidently thought it his duty to inform the authorities of the approaching encounter, and they had set a watch on me as being the only one they knew of as a culprit. They no doubt argued correctly that they would easily find the other party to the combat, if they followed me.

"Gentlemen," said I, "we shall have to cut for it."

"Oh no, I beg of you," entreated the Baron hastily, "no cutting now; we must retreat."

"Cutting for it, Baron," I said, "is an American term for retreating, a sort of bowie-knife phrase, as it were."

"I will not run," remarked Jones.

"Well, I will," said his cousin, with emphasis.

"I shall accompany you," put in the Baron de Bois, with equal firmness.

"Then, gentlemen," I begged them, "be good enough to take these knives with you, and drop them somewhere. I will stay with my opponent."

The two seconds started off, each carrying one of the deadly instruments.

"Take different directions!" I shouted after them. "That will divide the pursuit."

They did not answer, but they took my advice. The clergyman and one policeman promptly started after the Baron, while the other two officers pursued Derwent. It was easy to see that the latter, at least, would out-distance the leaden-footed justice. The authorities evidently thought that those who fled were the principals, and we speedily realised that we should be unmolested, for a time at least.

"Supposing we go back to Bruges, Jones?" I suggested.

"I am perfectly willing," he agreed.

I noticed when we set out for the cab that he limped perceptibly.

"Seems to me," I said, "that it was very foolish of you to walk here while your ankle was so bad."

"I am of the same opinion myself, now," he admitted; "but when my cousin and I set out I thought that a little exercise would do it good. It is not well to coddle a lame foot too much."

"I think that in the case of a sprain coddling is about the only remedy."

"I believe you are right," Jones conceded. "Certainly walking has made my ankle a good deal worse than it was when I set out. In fact, I am afraid I cannot walk back to the town."

"Why, I hope you are not thinking of walking," I said reprovingly. "You are coming back with me in my cab."

"You are very good. I shall be extremely obliged for a lift, I assure you."

Although we walked slowly to the waiting vehicle, when we entered it there was still no sign that justice had discovered its error, and was returning to secure the real culprits. As we drove away towards Bruges, I said to Jones—

"By the way, don't you think honour is satisfied

by the encounter of this morning ? Mine is, at any rate. How does yours feel ? "

" That question must be left entirely to our seconds. We are entirely in their hands."

" Oh, are we ? Then I'll bribe mine to say that it is all right. I have had enough of bloodshed."

Jones did not answer. There was not much conversation until we got back to the Grand Hotel.

" Will you come in and breakfast with me this morning ? " asked my enemy, as I helped him out of the carriage.

" Yes, I shall be very pleased to join you," I replied. " My honour is satisfied, but my appetite isn't. Doesn't duelling give a person a fine appetite ? I am going to do more of it after this."

I went with Jones up to his room, and helped him off with his shoe. His foot had swollen considerably.

" I dislike to trouble a suffering man with trivial affairs," I said. " But before I do anything more, I should like to ask you whether you have ordered breakfast ? "

" You must excuse me, really," said Jones, with hospitable apology. " I had forgotten the duties of host."

He rang the bell.

"What will you have? Give me your order now, so that there will be no delay when the man comes."

"I am not at all particular about anything but the speed of it. Let us have something sumptuous and rapid."

The servant appearing, Jones gave an order, and then hunted up his slippers. As we sat down to the table, Derwent came in, rather breathless, but otherwise unscathed.

"Oh, I say!" he cried. "I call this cool! Sitting down without me? That is thoroughly selfish, especially when you consider the risks I have literally run on your account."

"There is abundance, my boy. Sit down, and don't talk," said I.

"Seen anything of the Baron?" asked Derwent, sitting down. "It seemed to me they were gaining on him the last I saw of the race. The Baron's not in good running form just now."

"*Garçon,*" said Jones, "just put another plate there; we are expecting another gentleman presently."

"That's right," remarked Derwent, falling to

with zest. "It will not look quite so bally selfish, don't you know, if he does come."

The servant re-entered with the plate, and placed before Jones a card, saying—

"Zis gentleman wishes to see Monsieur, if he is disengaged."

Jones tossed the card over to me. On it were the words "Baron de Bois."

"Rather ceremonious in the circumstances," said Jones quietly. "Ask the gentleman to come up, Adolph."

The Baron came in, looking very red and out of breath, mopping his face, and all he could say for a few minutes was: "Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!"

We all laughed.

"We are waiting for you, Baron," I said. "You seem to have been in a hurry to get to breakfast."

"Ah, they run well, the reptiles!" he ejaculated. "I defeat them not by speed but by strategy. I see they overtake me. A question of time. I make for the canal. On the bank drawn up was one small boat. Into that I leap. Ah ha! Napoleon crossing——"

"The Delaware, eh?" I interrupted.

"The Danube, the Elbe, what you like. *They*

must go round by the gate and the bridge. Meanwhile I myself penetrate la Ville. I quickly attain the Place, and—I am here ! "

" That was magnificent," I said, in tones of admiration that greatly flattered the Baron de Bois. " But how is it, Derwent, that you reached the hotel first ? The Baron came the most direct way."

" By great leg-work, and also by strategy," replied Derwent. " I outstripped the villains easily so far as running was concerned, but I was making away from Bruges. I doubled on them, and made for the high road. They took it fairly easy, for they expected to get their cab, and overtake me before I reached the town. When I came to the cab the man was asleep on his box.

" ' Drive your cab to the Grand Place,' I cried, ' as quickly as possible. The officers will meet you there, and I will pay your fare.'

" This was all *he* wanted. His horse's head was already turned towards the town, and he never gave himself the trouble to look behind, or he would have seen my pursuers signalling. At the Grand Place I paid him, strolled away in an opposite direction, in case he noticed which way I went,

then made a quick detour, and so to the Rue St. Jacques."

It was rather a jolly breakfast, taking it all round, and when I left I drew the Baron aside.

"Baron," said I earnestly, "do you think honour is satisfied by this morning's meeting?"

"Ah, yes," he replied, without hesitation, "unless you wish to continue. The intention was good. The interruption could not have been prevented, and neither of you sought it. I take your instructions."

"I am very much obliged to you, Baron, for what you have done. I am perfectly satisfied to let matters rest as they are, if the other side will agree."

"Ah well, I will consult Mr. Derwent, and then I will do myself the honour of waiting on you, to acquaint you with his decision."

"Very good. I shall be pleased to see you. Cannot you dine with me to-night?"

"With extreme pleasure," said the Baron cordially. "Adieu!"

At the breakfast table I had related the full particulars of my interview with Mr. Dobel, giving them what I imagined to be the reason of our interruption on the field. We all of us expected every

minute to receive a visit from the police, but the meal passed off without any intervention. Now I thought it best to pay a second visit to the clergyman, and learn whether he intended to push the thing any farther. I found that estimable gentleman resting on the sofa after his fatiguing morning's work.

"Ah!" he cried, rising, and flushing with anger. "It is *you*, is it? I must say that I did not expect a visit from you."

"Well, I don't know why you shouldn't," I said mildly. "You co-operated with me admirably to-day, and it was the least I could do to call and thank you. I hope the exercise and the early morning air have not injured your health."

"Thank you," he replied, not in the most mollified tone. "I have only done what seemed to me to be my duty. The results I must leave to a higher authority."

"Well," I went on, "you did not give me time to explain when I last saw you that I am a most unwilling participant in this affair, and I am heartily glad that it is over. Of course, I had no intention of hurting the man."

"You made yourself a party, sir, to a possible

crime," said Mr. Dobel severely. "A crime against the laws of whatever civilised country you happened to be in, and, what is worse, against the laws of God. There is no excuse for you, sir. I hope you will not waste time in attempting to make any. What is the object of your present visit?"

"Principally to know whether you mean to take any further action in this matter."

"I shall have to know first whether you intend to have a recurrence of the affair so fortunately interrupted this morning."

"I believe not," I assured him. "There will be no repetition if I can avoid it. Honour seems to be satisfied, and anyhow I know that I am."

"In that case," said Mr. Dobel, "I will see the magistrate, and place before him the fact that you have desisted from your course. My object is prevention, not vengeance. Who was the other party to the—to the crime?"

"There has been, so far as I am aware, no crime at all up to date. I do not feel at liberty to mention the name of anyone else. In case you wish to do anything further, I desire that the brunt of the affair shall fall on me. That will make the mention of anyone else quite unnecessary."

"I only wish to be sure that there will be no recurrence of the wickedness."

"If that is all, I think you may rest quite satisfied on that score," I promised him. "Good morning."

At six o'clock that evening the Baron arrived at my hotel, resplendent in evening dress and a white tie. His fur-lined overcoat was open, and, all in all, he was a most magnificent little Frenchman.

"Have you received police notice that you must leave Bruges?" he asked at once.

"No. Why?" I questioned.

"That is very strange. Both Mr. Jones and Mr. Derwent were told that they must remove themselves within two days. They will leave to-morrow for Ghent."

"I have been away all day until now," I said, just remembering the fact. "Waiter, has anyone called for me to-day?"

"Oui, M'sieur. De officare. He vill call again."

"I shall get the notice then. Well, Baron, how about a renewal of hostilities?"

"I regret much to say, my dear sir, that Mr. Derwent was immovable. He insists that the combat take place at Ghent."

CHAPTER XI

I PUT MY FOOT IN IT

THE Baron de Bois enjoyed his dinner. He praised the wine and the cuisine. He did ample justice to both, and when he left he embraced me, and swore he was going to see me through this duelling business if the heavens fell. I wanted to get a cab to take him home in, but he would not hear of it. Neither would he let me accompany him farther than the square. I thought that perhaps the Baron's lodging was not as sumptuous as the one he had been accustomed to in Paris, so I did not insist.

The Baron's English was of a most uncertain quality. Under ordinary circumstances it was very good, but when he laboured under excitement it was apt to become a little obscure. It was not at its best on this occasion. He talked unceasingly, and reminded me a dozen times that a telegram from me would bring him at once to Ghent, or anywhere

else outside France, to be my second in the momentous affair.

He embraced me once more in front of the Belfry, and that was the last I ever saw of the genial Baron.

In the morning I was officially notified that two days was all the time I would have in which to see and enjoy Bruges on that occasion. I made the most of my time. I boldly took out my camera and tripod, and photographed right and left. I found great difficulty in getting a good picture of the Belfry, as it was so situated that at no time was the sun shining on the front until the sun was too low to be of use photographically. It being winter time, the difficulty was aggravated. Still, one could purchase picture postcards showing the Belfry in every possible aspect, and the sleepy old streets offered a wealth of picturesque subjects within my camera's scope. Low-arched, quaint, ancient doorways framed charming Belgian dames busy making beautiful lace, and I imagine the tiny latticed windows admitted insufficient light for this delicate work to be carried on as comfortably inside the house. There seemed not a building without architectural and artistic charm, and the date embroidered on each stone wall in quaint ironwork

showed that nearly all the houses were three or four centuries old.

I spent a good deal of time at the old Church of Notre Dame. So far as the exteriors are concerned, none of the churches of Bruges is at all remarkable. Notre Dame dates from the thirteenth century, and has a tower nearly four hundred feet high. Inside it is rich in works of art. The attraction for me was the exquisite statue of the Virgin and Child by Michael Angelo. This is one of his earlier works, and one of the most beautiful. Bruges is justly proud of it, and refused the large offer that Horace Walpole once made for it.

Opposite the church is the Hospital of St. John, also an art treasure-house. I regret that I am compelled to admit that before I reached Bruges I never had heard of Memling, many of whose paintings are in the Hospital of St. John. It is said, however, that the collection of this painter's works alone is well worth a trip from America to Bruges to see. The finest of Memling's paintings are on a little Gothic building that looks like a small model of a church; a painting for every panel. The beautiful little model revolves on a pedestal standing in the centre of the room. It is called the

"Châsse of St. Ursula." The paintings represent incidents in the life of the saint, who was said to be the daughter of a British king. According to the legend, she went to the Continent to avoid a distasteful marriage, and with a number of devout British women she travelled by Cologne and Bâle to Italy, where the Pope received her with great honours. When they arrived back again, however, the sisterhood, with the noble Ursula, were put to death by heathen warriors, who met them as they landed at Cologne, and shot them with bows and arrows. Six of Memling's panels represent incidents in St. Ursula's pilgrimage, and her martyrdom. The casket was ordered by the Hospital in 1480, and it is said that Hans Memling spent six years in completing the series of pictures.

Behind the Belfry is a network of streets and canals. There are some very picturesque bits here, with the tall tower reflected in the still water, which is bordered by houses old and quaint. Wandering in this network, I heard the sound of music. Investigation proved that it came from a number of saloons that faced the fish market. The source of the music in each instance was a large organ, worked

by hand power, and from outside the effect was anything but musical.

Here collected the Brugeans, with numerous Brugesses. They were evidently of the lower classes, and these were their theatres. Entrance was free, but the moment a person went in he had to go to the bar and provide himself with a glass of beer.

The beer was even worse than the mingled music. It was a very thin, acid drink, and after my first sip from the glass I purchased, I bestowed the beer on one of the company, who was ridiculously grateful for it. This was the more astonishing as he had just finished a glass of his own.

A little shelf about six inches wide ran around the room some distance above the heads of those standing up, and on this those who wished to dance put their glasses of beer. Dancing seemed to be the attraction of the moment, but there was a bench along the walls for anyone who preferred to sit down.

The big organ stood in a recess of the front window, about four feet from the floor. It seemed to have this position so that it would throw out its stentorian strains to the fish market in front, and thus entice the passer-by, competing with the organs

in rival cafés along the street. A hanging curtain separated it from the room, and against this the head of the strenuous Belgian who played the organ made a sort of outward bulge every time he turned the crank. We got a sight of the musician only during the interval between the dances, when he put his big nose over the curtain-rod, and looked down on the dancers going back to their bench and to their beer.

The organ was a most powerful instrument, particularly awe-inspiring on the bass notes. There was a roar and force about it that I have never heard equalled. It took a tune in its massive jaws, and shook the life out of it. The tunes were very short, and at the end of each we had a momentary glimpse of the organist's nose, but in that brief silence there came to us the equally strident tones of organs in neighbouring establishments. That stirred up our organist to a frenzy of opposition, and he ground out another terrific waltz or two-step. The dancing to either tune consisted principally of hopping first on one foot, then on the other, going round in a circle all the time.

After I had been in the place a few moments, I was astonished (which I shouldn't have been, by

this time) to see Jones look in for a moment, and then enter. I went up to him.

" Hello, Jones," I said. " I didn't know you were fond of music ? "

" I do not know that I am ; at least, of this kind of music. But I always like to see the peasantry of any country either at work or amusing themselves."

" Oh, yes. That's what we all say when we are caught in places of this kind. Still, you have arrived just a moment too late."

" How is that ? "

" I have but this moment given away my glass of beer. I would have given you the preference if you had been here a moment sooner. That would have saved you a penny. Now you will have to pay for your own drinks."

" I'm very sorry, I'm sure."

At this moment the proprietor of the establishment touched Jones on the shoulder, and politely informed him that it was etiquette, in this temple of music and dancing, to purchase beer on entering. Jones went to the little bar at the corner, and bought a glass of beer from the fat woman who dealt it out there. He took a sip, and immediately handed the glass, with one of his best bows, to a

red-cheeked damsel, who took it and thanked him in Flemish. Then Jones and I sat down to watch the dancers.

Presently there entered a couple who looked even stranger in the place than we did. A pretty girl and a well-set-up young man, very obviously on their wedding tour, came in and stood almost directly in front of us. Seeing that they made no move toward the bar, the proprietor approached them as he had Jones, and spoke to the man.

"What does he say, Peggy?" asked the young man.

She laughed a little, and answered that he was expected to buy some beer for himself and for her.

"Oh, that's the way they run this thing, is it? What's the French for telling him to treat the crowd?"

"You mustn't do anything like that, Howard. It will attract attention," said the girl. "Give him some centimes, and I'll tell him that we do not want any beer."

"Well, I always do just what you tell me, Peggy, but I would like to treat the crowd, just to see how they would take it," answered her husband, evidently reluctant to abandon the idea. "I don't

suppose anybody ever treated a crowd in his life over here in Europe."

"Howard" gave the man a franc, and the proprietor moved away, no doubt wishing he had many such customers. There was no question about the nationality of the young couple. They were compatriots of my own.

"Oh, isn't it all delightfully foreign!" said the girl joyously.

"You bet it is! That's what they're here for," replied her companion. "Say, Peggy, I've just got to come back and treat this crowd. I want to see the effect."

"Hadn't we better go now?" suggested his wife, a little anxiously. "It would be dreadful if any Americans saw us in this place."

"My dear, haven't I told you a dozen times that there isn't a single American in Europe but ourselves, and, by George, now I come to think of it, we are not single, are we, Peggy?"

She gave his arm a little squeeze, and laughed very musically.

"Besides, my dearest Peggy, you must remember that there are about a hundred million of Americans, more or less, and they don't all have the pleasure

and the advantage of our acquaintance. As a matter of fact, you will probably send a full account of this place in one of your voluminous letters home, and everybody of our acquaintance will know about it before we get back, anyhow."

"Don't they dance funnily?" said Peggy, watching the awkward, hopping steps.

"I don't see much fun in that sort of dancing myself," commented her husband, "but very likely they do. Come, Peggy, let's have a waltz!"

"Oh, no, no!" said the girl emphatically, shaking her head; but the other insisted.

"Come on, Peggy. You must enter into the spirit of foreign travel. When you are in Bruges, do as the Brobdingnagians do, you know. Let's show 'em a real American two-step, just for their education."

"We *couldn't* dance in such a place as this! I'm astonished at you, Howard!"

"Not half so astonished as they will be," laughed the young man. "Now, there's a waltz tune beginning! Oh, I must have a dance! If you won't dance with me, I'll take that big girl with wooden shoes."

He put his arm round her waist, and in spite of

her protests they glided out among the dancers. I have seen some pretty good dancing in my young days, but never anything to equal that waltz. The two danced together perfectly, and one would judge that they had had much practice together during the days of courtship. Round and round they went, and their feet seemed hardly to touch the sanded floor. One by one the other dancers fell away, until the young foreign couple had the floor to themselves.

Everybody stared with open mouth: it was a revelation to them. The proprietor tactfully went to the man with the big nose and told him to keep on grinding until the couple chose to stop. This way and that the Americans floated round the room, amidst the complete silence of everyone in it.

The agony of that organist was terrible. He wanted to see what was going on, and yet he had to turn the crank, and the efforts he made to do his duty and at the same time get his big nose over the curtain bar were painful to behold. At length someone of a merciful turn of mind pulled aside the curtain, and the strenuous man was able to feast his eyes without neglecting his work.

At last the young people stopped, flushed and

cheerful. A great burst of applause came from the spectators. They felt that they had had more than their money's worth.

I don't know what demon possessed me at this moment, but as they were making for the door I intercepted them, and with a start of surprise exclaimed—

"Why, Howard, old chap, who would have expected to see *you* here! How did you leave all the folks at home? They never told me you were coming in this direction. Well, of all the unexpected——! When did you come over?"

An agony of attempted recollection passed over the young man's face. He flushed, and stammered—

"I—really—why, it isn't—— No, I'm hanged if I can remember you!"

The look of dismay on the girl's face made me instantly ashamed of myself. I had not paused to consider her feelings.

"Of course you don't!" I assured him hastily. "It was only a stupid joke of mine! I heard you called 'Howard,' and I acted on the spur of the moment, thinking that as you were evidently a good-natured chap and a fellow-countryman of my own, I would spring this on you. I apologise

for my clumsy attempt at humour, and I hope you will pardon me."

Before he could answer, Jones, who had overheard our conversation, sprang to his feet.

"It was the most heartless thing I ever saw done," he cried, "and I am glad I was here when it *was* done. You may leave your revenge in my hands, sir. I have a duel to fight with this person in Ghent, and I assure you I shall remember this outrage when I meet him on that occasion."

"Oh, see here!" cried the American protestingly, "it's all right. Why, come to think of it, it was a pretty good joke, and I'd probably have done the same thing myself in the circumstances, if I'd been clever enough to think of it. My wife doesn't mind it either—do you, Peggy?"

"I don't mind it now," she said, smiling. Evidently she had a good sense of humour, and that overcame her temporary annoyance. "I was afraid it might be a friend of my husband's. He has so many of them."

"Your good nature will not prevent my punishing him," said Jones severely.

"Don't brag, Jones," I warned him. "Remember that *I'm* going to be there."

"Oh, please, don't do anything so dreadful!" begged the girl, looking from one to the other of us, evidently only half believing that we were in earnest. "I assure you I don't mind it in the least, and indeed I have rather enjoyed meeting a fellow-countryman again."

When they had gone, I turned somewhat fiercely to Jones.

"Do you think, sir, that you have come very brightly out of this affair?" I demanded. "Don't you think your interference was as unwarranted as my miserable joke?"

"Perhaps you are right, sir. We will, however, settle that at Ghent."

"Oh, Ghent!" I exclaimed impatiently. "Can you talk of nothing else? And how you bragged about it—before a lady, too! Jones, I'm ashamed of you."

"Well, sir, if you were not such a coward and would fight with civilised——"

"A coward, sir? A coward, indeed! Now, on your honour, do you think I'm a coward?"

"I spoke hastily," admitted Jones frankly. "No, I do not."

"Thanks. I was only asking for information.

I wasn't sure about it myself. I believe I admitted to you once that I was a coward. Well, I take that back now. I will meet you at Ghent; and what is more, since you desire it, I will meet you with pistols."

"I am much obliged to you," said Jones, lifting his hat. He turned on his heel, and was gone.

"Now I *have* put my foot in it," said I to myself.

CHAPTER XII

THE PIED PIPER OF BRUGES

NEXT day being my last in Bruges, I breathed a hope that I had seen the last of Jones, and started out on a photographic revel. I promenaded entirely round the town, and took pictures of all the gates. As I have said before, the Porte d'Ostende is particularly picturesque. By bribing a railway official I managed to secure a position on the track that enabled me to get just the view of it I wanted.

On the town side of the canal the banks form what seems to be a fashionable promenade, shaded with trees. To the north of the town are old ramparts bordering the canal, and on them are great windmills, their gaunt arms looking as though winter had stripped them of their foliage, as it had done the trees.

Striking into the town again by way of the Rue des Carmes, I came to the gloomy Convent of the

English Ladies. This is the scene of Wordsworth's poem—

> "In Bruges town is many a street
> Whence busy life has fled;
> Where, without hurry, noiseless feet
> The grass-grown pavement tread."

Then the poet goes on to state how he and his companions heard behind the grated window a lady's voice singing a song, and the words were English. The pavement of the streets is really grown with grass, as it was in the days of the poet, doubtless. I should like, however, to call the attention of future poets to the fact that the pronunciation of the word "Bruges" is not such as both Longfellow and Wordsworth would have us think it. It is a word of one syllable.

Proceeding still farther into the town, I came to one of the interior canals, and here proceeded to make the mistake of my life in Belgium. My tour had so far been rather unfortunate in the matter of mistakes, but this one eclipsed them all.

There were some pretty views along the Quai Ste. Anne and on the opposite side. Three little Brugians in great wooden shoes were watching me with absorbed interest. I asked them to

stand together, so that I might photograph them, and this they did so very nicely that I gave them a couple of sous apiece.

This was the beginning of the mistake. Bruges is a city of paupers. More than one-third of its inhabitants are beggars. A penny in Bruges stands at about the same value in the eyes of the population that a sovereign does in London. The news that a foreign millionaire had dropped down on Bruges spread with fearful rapidity.

A hundred children were almost instantly at my heels or in front of me, every one of them desiring to be photographed. I tried to drive them away, or frighten them, or coax them, but it was all wasted effort. At every step I took the number increased.

I then took to my heels, but the little urchins, in spite of their wooden shoes, kept up with me. The clatter of the wooden shoes became steadily greater in volume.

I next tried dodging the youngsters. This was just what they liked. They knew the crooked old town much better than I did, and by degrees I came to recognise their shriek of joy when I went down some alley where they knew they could head

me off by taking a short cut. And always the crowd was increasing.

I became alarmed as I stood on a bridge and looked back. There were thousands of youngsters by this time. I thought I could stay the mob long enough to allow me to get out of reach, by throwing some pennies among them, and stealing away during the scrimmage.

The effect was appalling. A fight of wild animals was nothing to it. Instead of running, I went back among the struggling throng, and tried to prevent some of the smaller members from being trampled to death. My closed camera was, like John Brown's knapsack, strapped upon my back, and so my hands were free. With the alpenstock tripod I laid around on the backs of the bigger boys, and forced them, with much howling, to get up from the prostrate bodies of the smaller folk. I found that only half a dozen or so were hurt, and those not badly, for which I thanked good luck in an unlucky business. I tried to console the injured ones by giving them a penny each, though I should have known better.

Then ensued the most ludicrous sight I ever saw. Every time I had given money away the mischief

had become more aggravated. The moment the sound children saw the injured get the cash, they began to limp and whimper. The whole five thousand were now hopeless cripples. They howled and limped after me, and the effect was to increase the crowd and call out the older paupers to witness the extraordinary spectacle. It seemed to spread rapidly through the city that some fiend had bewitched all the children. I was followed, like the Pied Piper of Hamelin, by all the children of the place, but that celebrated musician had an orderly crowd compared with mine. Everybody limped after me, and raised their voices in the most dismal wails ever heard on earth. The older people did not know what the matter was, but they became threatening also.

Then I took to my heels and ran as fast as I could. Still the limpers kept within a reasonable distance of me, and if there was a chance of my getting out of sight they dropped the limp for a few minutes, and resumed it again when they were close enough to make it effective.

As the procession passed the Grand Hotel everybody was at the windows. Among the other faces there I saw that of Derwent, who was grinning at

my discomfiture. How I hated that man! Even the frigid Jones was preferable.

At last I reached the station square, and bolted into my hotel. Before I reached my room and looked out, the big square was filled with an angry crowd. The older people were becoming more and more threatening. They had nothing to do the whole year round, and a thing like this was a welcome diversion.

The children yelled with vexation at the escape of their prey, but by this time children formed but a minor portion of the crowd. It seemed as though the entire adult population of Bruges had packed themselves into the station square. Many of them carried sticks and stones in their hands, and it required only some hot-headed person to throw the first stone to begin a full-sized riot.

The hotel proprietor was thoroughly frightened. He put up the shutters on his lower windows, and then came in and begged me to go out and be mobbed. That I refused to do. There was no sign now of the police who had been so active in suppressing me ever since I crossed the Channel. I stood at the window watching the mob, and told the proprietor, without turning, to go down and run his hotel,

and leave me alone. I didn't feel like going out and taking a walk just then.

A few minutes later he came up again. I turned on him angrily and said—

"See here! I am a guest of your old tavern. I will *not* go out. I pay my bills when they are presented to me. Go downstairs, and don't bother me."

"But no," he said. "M'sieur Shones, he weesh to see you."

"All right," said I; "tell him to come up."

In a few moments Jones appeared, frigid and correct as ever.

"I ventured to call," he began, "as I thought I might be of some assistance. I noticed you pass my hotel rather—well, hurriedly, you know—and I thought that perhaps something was wrong."

"Everything's wrong," I answered wearily. "Nothing has gone right since I entered Belgium. I am very much obliged to you, but I don't see how you can be of any help this time. Those lunatics apparently wish to kill me, if they can induce me to go down among them, and all because I was idiot enough to give a few of the children some pennies."

"Well, something must be done," insisted Jones.

"There is danger in delay. They were talking rather hotly when I came through, and if they begin stoning the hotel they will not leave an unbroken window in it. Within five minutes every pane will be smashed. Then the proprietor will try to hold you responsible for the damage, and it will be quite an expensive business by the time you are through with it."

"I don't see what is to be done," I said. "Why don't the police disperse the mob?"

"Perhaps because they recognise the fact that it is too big for them at present. The police will be on the ground in force the moment the mob has left, and then they will probably arrest you. You see, you are under their ban already. If you will take my advice, you will pitch that camera into the first canal you reach."

"Can you show me how to get to the canal?"

This problem was too much for Jones, but he evaded it deftly.

"Let us have up the proprietor," he suggested. "He seems a sensible man."

"Oh, he is. He wants Daniel to go out among the lions."

I rang for the proprietor. When he came, Jones asked him—

"When is there a train for Ghent?"

The proprietor looked at his watch, and replied that one left in ten minutes.

"Good!" remarked Jones, with satisfaction. "Now, is there a way out at the back of the hotel?"

There was no public exit, the proprietor said, but a person *could* get out that way.

"Excellent!" Jones commented. He turned to me. "Now, if you will let me take that tripod of yours, I will draw off the crowd."

"Will you leave it for me at Ghent?"

"You don't intend to throw away the camera, then? Very well; I will take care of the tripod. Now, monsieur, if you will show me the way out at the back, so that I can get along to a point on the street a few hundred yards ahead of the mob, I will undertake to outrun them."

"How about your ankle?" I questioned in some astonishment.

"Oh, it is quite well, thank you," he replied off-handedly. "Now, if I were you, I should not cross to the station until a very few minutes before the train leaves. And you, monsieur," he went on,

turning to the proprietor, " when I have time to reach the street by the back way, go out and shout to the crowd that the miscreant has escaped. Tell them the name of the street I have taken, and point out the way. I will wait with the tripod over my shoulder until the first of the crowd gets a sight of me. Then, if they follow me, they shall have all the running they want."

I watched from the window for three minutes, and began to be afraid that I should not have time, after all, to reach the train.

Suddenly there was a movement on the right of the crowd, and then renewed yells. The mob broke away in that direction, like a lake that has suddenly found an outlet.

Ten minutes later I was in the train, speeding towards Ghent.

CHAPTER XIII

AMONG THE BELLS

I LEFT Bruges at 2.55, and reached Ghent at 3.40. Outside the station I found a comfortable electric tram invitingly labelled with the name of the square in which I had chosen my hotel, so I ignored the persuasive offers of taxis or carriages, and stepped into the tram. My ticket cost me a penny, but I discovered later that by paying an extra sou I could have ridden first-class. These fares were uniform, and carried one to any part of the town, while there were no extra charges for "transfer" tickets. Ghent was an ideal town for a visitor who does his sight-seeing, as I do, by tram car. I got my money's worth on this first ride, for the tram seemed to take me over most of the town.

It was raining, of course, having been fair during the first part of the day. Belgium dislikes to have one day wholly clear during the winter. You are

certain to catch the rain at some part of the day.

The hotel was an old-fashioned one in the square called the Marche aux Grains, and as that is the terminus for most of the trams, I was very handily situated.

I did not attempt any exploration of the town until next morning, and then I left my camera safely indoors, although I found many subjects that I wished to photograph. I had not got away from canals in leaving Bruges, for Ghent is divided by these waterways into twenty-six distinct islands, and eighty bridges are required to link the dissected town together.

Some of the most picturesque corners of Ghent are not mentioned in the guide-book at all : quaint balconies, beautiful windows and doorways, overlooked by the casual visitor. The houses for the most part are lofty and picturesque, dating from those prosperous days when the citizens of Ghent were so rich and powerful that they formed practically a republic of their own, and on one occasion were strong enough to repulse an army of twenty-four thousand English soldiers, led by Edward I. When the citizens of Ghent displayed the white plume,

their nominal rulers trembled, contrary to all accepted custom, and the local tax collectors, if they were wise, took single tickets for some conveniently distant spot. Should these high-spirited Ghenters take a dislike to some new imposition, they promptly donned white caps or white badges, took their firearms, and proceeded to expel such officials as were authorised to collect payment of the tax, and probably they dismissed less culpable servants, to make good measure.

In the year 1400 there were forty thousand weavers alone in Ghent, and as they passed to and from their work they filled the narrow streets of Ghent so completely that the remaining citizens of the town (which boasted " 80,000 men capable of bearing arms ") dare not venture out. A warning bell was rung in time to allow everyone to reach safety before the weavers poured into the streets, and while the bell continued to ring those who did not wish to be trampled underfoot or crushed in the crowd remained indoors.

Although the population has now increased to nearly 165,000, the ringing of that bell no longer frightens the good people of Ghent from road or pavement. I was driven into my hotel, however,

by a signal as effective as the peal of olden days—a sharp shower of rain. When I went up to my room, I found my tripod there, and so knew that Jones and his cousin had reached the town.

After lunch, the weather having cleared up somewhat, I renewed my tour of discovery. The Cathedral of St. Bavon impressed me more by its air of grim strength and ruggedness than by any architectural attractiveness, and the richly decorated interior, with its wealth of valuable pictures, seemed to call for such an extensive study that it was scarcely worth while to begin after lunch. Therefore I determined to ascend the tower, which stands a short distance from the Cathedral. I read in the guide-book that this belfry was only two-thirds of the height the architect intended it to be, so I thought it best to ascend before they got the other third on. I had not climbed the tower at Bruges —the other third was on that.

The stairway of the belfry is very dark and steep and narrow. In some places there is no hand-rail, but a rope instead, and clinging to this the foolish tourist laboriously ascends. The old man who acts as guide more than earns the fee of one franc,

for he climbs those steps with every person who wishes to mount them.

When we got up, he pointed out to me the bell that the Austrians had tried to silence. It was used to call the Ghenters to arms, and to do those good people justice it must be admitted that they were always spoiling for a fight. The Austrians fired a ball from the citadel in 1789, and the aim was so true that the cannon ball went right through the bronze monster. But this did not silence it. The bell after that gave out a shriller, more warlike note than ever, and I hope that on its next call the burghers arose and mopped the floor with the Austrians, although up to the present time I regret to say that I have not heard how the fight turned out.

There are forty-four bells in the belfry of Ghent, and every quarter of an hour they ring out their merry tunes. There is an arrangement by which a bell organist, as one might say, can work a key-board, and play any tune he wishes on the bells. As everyone in town can hear him when he is practising, it must be rather trying to their nerves when a new man is at the music.

Above the bells is a large chamber in which stands a cylinder that automatically plays the tunes the

bells peal out. Steel spikes that can be moved with a wrench, and by a man who understands it, work the levers that communicate by wires down to the hammers of the bells. When the man and the wrench move them properly to other places on the cylinder, they play another tune. Thus Ghent hears from her old belfry the newest opera tunes as soon as the cylindrical music is written with the wrench.

I climbed in among the bells, taking care to choose a time when they were not about to strike, and I thrust my arm in the hole the cannon ball had left, and read the inscription on the biggest bell: "My name is Roland; when I am rung hastily, then there is a fire; when I resound in peals, there is a storm in Flanders." (At least, that is what my guide-book, being a better Flemish scholar than I am, tells me I read.)

As I wished to stay some time in the tower, which commands a view of most of Flanders, I gave the old man an extra franc, as I saw he was anxious to get down, fearing he would miss some custom, and told him I wanted to remain. Accordingly he left the doors open, and descended.

I stopped there alone with the silent bells, or,

rather, the intermittently silent bells, for every now and then they would break out with their noisy jangle, which, however musical it sounded below, was there a wild babel of noise.

I looked out over the quaint old city. The tower stands almost in the centre of it, and the view from each of the four sides is a wonderful one. The silver canals winding through level Flanders; the distant villages dimly seen; the belts of rain crossing the flat country, and in other parts the sun shining on fields that were green notwithstanding the season, made a view that was well worth studying and lingering over.

Then I went up to the room above. The bells were too deafening for close companionship. That old belfry is a good place in which to meditate, were it not for the "clangour of the bells." For over seven hundred years it has stood guard over the ancient city of Ghent. The burghers forced from the nobles the privilege of ringing its bell when they wanted to assemble the citizens either for war or counsel, and when its peals awakened the echoes the citizens gathered in the neighbouring square, which might at one time have been called the storm centre of Europe.

Old Roland heralded not only the natural storms, but also the civic storms that shook the city of Ghent. In the square now stands a bronze statue of the famous "Brewer of Ghent," Jacques von Artevelde. His right hand is upraised as if to quell a tumult, or perhaps to incite the mob to further deeds of violence. Artevelde was for seven years supreme ruler in Ghent, banishing or putting to death whoever thwarted his will. Nevertheless, it was to him that Ghent owed its profitable connection with England, for he was an ally of Edward III., and during this friendship England learned much from Ghent about the manufacture of wool, and trade between the two countries became mutually very advantageous.

Up into this tower the cruel Duke of Alva brought his master, Charles V., and proposed to him that the city of Ghent should be totally destroyed; but that monarch was so impressed with its beauty as seen from their lofty standpoint that he refused the cold-blooded proposal.

While I was thinking of all these things, and contrasting them with the peaceful state of things at the present time, I heard voices in the room below. The old man had evidently made some more

francs. Listening, I imagined that one voice was the voice of Jones. He was saying, as if in answer to a question—

"Yes; they will ring now in one minute."

I did not care to meet Jones, and so I remained where I was. In a very short time, however, I changed my mind. I heard the sudden sound of a struggle. There was no cry. Then I heard another voice saying—

"Don't choke 'im to death, Bill. Must look like a haccident, you know. We'll put 'is 'ead under the big 'ammer when it strikes, and then down 'e drops below. 'E wus hexaminin' the bells, you know."

"Right y'are," was the answer, and the next moment the bells rang out merrily.

In less time than it takes to tell it, I was down in the room of the bells. The noise of the ringing made any other sound inaudible to anyone else in the room. There I saw Jones, with his eyes staring and his face blackened with suffocation, in the hands of two ruffians who were pressing his head against the great bell just beside the tremendous hammer, which was slowly trembling on the rise.

I was unarmed, yet there was but one moment

in which to act. A short ladder stood against the wall, evidently used for climbing up to the machinery when it needed oiling. I thought, by the look that came to me from the eyes of Jones, that he was not insensible, although he could not speak. He faced me, but luckily the others did not. There seemed to come into his eyes a gleam of hope, or it might have been the last glimmer of expiring consciousness.

I seized the ladder in the middle with both hands, and using it like a battering-ram I put all my strength into the thrusts. At the same time I gave an unearthly yell that rang even above the chimes, and sent assassins and victim in a heap among the clamouring bells.

It was too dark among the bells to see accurately what was going on, but the ruffian who had been doing the choking seemed to have been struck on the shoulder by one of the smaller hammers, and knocked down. It was evident now that Jones had not lost consciousness, for he struck wildly right and left, while I stood outside, fearing to enter among the striking hammers, yet watching my chance to get a dig at the assailants with the end of my ladder.

"Look out, Jones!" I yelled. "Those planks are loose. It's hundreds of feet down to the bottom."

As I shouted this I heard the door slam behind me. I looked round, expecting help, if only from the old keeper of the tower, but it was one of the ruffians escaping. He had crawled around under the bells in the darkness, and left the other to meet what fate he might. His accomplice was between Jones and me, but on seeing that his pal had got away, he dodged like a cat under the big bell, and although I got one good punch at him with the ladder, he was out and away before I could do anything more effective.

Jones lay panting on the loose planks over that apparently bottomless abyss, and the bells ceased their terror.

"Don't follow them," he said feebly, as I made for the door. "Don't leave me here alone. I fear I am going to faint. I'm hurt."

I crawled in to where he lay, and helped him out into the open. The cool air that blew through the tower kept him from showing any sign of weakness, and he sat on the ledge until he got his breath again.

"By George," I said, "that was a close call, Jones!"

"Yes, it was," replied Jones. "Do you know that they were the same two villains who attacked me at Bruges? I feel sure of it. I ought to have thought of it when I saw them first, but it didn't occur to me to suspect anything wrong."

"Were they here in the tower when you came up?" I questioned.

"No, but they followed immediately after me. The old man said the doors were open, and so he did not come with me. They must have been close behind me, almost at my heels. Perhaps they followed me on purpose."

I thought this extremely likely.

"Have they robbed you this time?"

"No," said Jones, feeling in his pockets.

"Are you hurt, do you think?'

"I thought I was at first, but I imagine it must have been the choking. I feel quite revived now. By the way, did you get your tripod?"

"Hang the tripod! That is to say, yes, of course I got it, and I am very much obliged. This is a most mysterious affair, however, and I am much more concerned about it than about my camera.

Why did they attack you, if not to rob you ? "

" I'm sure I don't know," confessed Jones. " That fellow is an expert, at any rate, even though he has twice failed to do any serious damage. I don't understand why they should attack me. I haven't an enemy in the world."

" You forget me, Jones," I said. " You may as well make up your mind to one thing. Someone in this world is interested in murdering you."

CHAPTER XIV

"ENGLISH SPOKEN"

AFTER the fight among the bells, Jones and I went down and interviewed the old keeper of the tower. He had seen no one go up since Jones paid him. He thought that if anybody else had gone up they had done so because they noticed that the door was left open, and thus avoided the payment of a franc each. Jones said nothing about the assault, but generously put his hand in his pocket, and paid the old man the admission fee of his two would-be murderers.

I saw Jones safely to his hotel before going on to my own. I was thoroughly convinced that there was someone in Belgium who wanted the life of Jones. I tried to put some caution into the Englishman, but he pooh-poohed the idea. The men had been angered, he said, at being driven out of Bruges by the information he had given, and he supposed they had seen him in Ghent, and perhaps followed

him until they got a chance to wreak their revenge. I begged him at least to avoid giving them any further opportunity of attacking him, and to keep clear of lonely streets and deserted buildings, but I felt no confidence that he would act on my advice.

That evening I made a tour of the city, to find some place of amusement. There was little use in going to the regular theatre, since I could not understand the play. There was no opera, and at last I found there was not much choice in anything else. There was a variety theatre, however, and I squandered the price of a red-cushioned stall directly in front of the stage.

The Ghenters seem to be an economical people, for with the exception of an oldish man who sat beside me, and some military officers just behind me, there was no one in these higher-priced seats. The rest of the hall was full, and aproned waiters were kept busy running with glasses of beer, and some of the lighter wines that could be obtained by ordering them specially. Everything was done on a very fair basis, and along the walls were great cards with the prices of refreshments in big letters, so that a person knew just how to measure his thirst with

his pocket-book. A ledge in front of everybody provided a handy rest for glasses.

The performance was the usual thing. There was a good deal of rather worn-out singing. There were some acrobats. There was the comic man who gave impersonations of character that I could not understand, and there was the regular interval of ten minutes, during which the orchestra did valiant service.

When the interval began, the elderly man at my side got up and went behind the scenes. He seemed to be a sort of autocrat in the place, for the waiters were very obsequious to him. He left in his seat a paper which I noticed was printed in English. The sight of English was by this time very welcome to me. It seemed an age since I had seen an English paper. I picked it up, and found it a weekly published in Brussels—the *Brussels News*, I think it was called.

I was reading it when the old gentleman came back and sat down. I apologised for taking his paper, and he was very courteous about it. He said I was more than welcome to it; that he had read it, and added that I should find it a very good paper.

His English was so grotesque that I will make no attempt to reproduce it. It was by all odds the most wonderful example of English as she is spoke that I had yet met in my travels. When the old gentleman found that I was an English-speaking person myself, he seemed to warm up, and evidently wanted to try as much of his acquired language on me as time would permit. He regretted that there were so few English-speaking gentlemen among his acquaintances. He felt that to speak the language correctly he needed to speak more with those whose native tongue it was.

I told him that I thought he spoke it now in a most remarkable manner.

He bowed and said he was aware that he spoke well—there was no use denying it. Englishmen had told him so. Still, he felt that there might, perhaps, be some intricacies about the accent that he had not yet overcome, and that he would like to be able to speak so that no one could tell that he was a Belgian. He admitted that people from England found no difficulty in taking him for one who was not brought up in England. I said that was astonishing, but he persisted in the belief that there were still some subtleties about the accent

that he had not yet mastered. He had learned English, he added, altogether by reading the *Brussels News*. He never had any teacher, he assured me with pardonable pride. He was the manager, he further confided, of a café in Brussels similar to the one we were then in. He was here to conduct negotiations with a singer whom he hoped to secure as an artiste for his own café. I should see her in a few moments, he added, and begged me to tell him what I thought of her. Madame Cécile's song was the second item on the programme after the interval.

See, he pointed out, how the theatre was filling up. It was all on account of Madame Cécile.

There was no question about the fact that the theatre was rapidly filling up. Almost every one of the red plush seats was taken, and there was standing-room only in the rest of the vast hall. The old man rubbed his hands with pleasure, and when a man behind asked him, in French, whether Madame Cécile had sung yet, the old man winked at me when he had given a voluminous answer.

Did I know much about London? he asked. Yes, I knew London very well indeed. Ah! that was a great privilege. He hoped some day to

visit the big city, but it was so far away. I laughed at him.

"Good gracious," I said, "you can't call it far to London."

Then he admitted that the Channel was a drawback, in which assertion I quite agreed with him.

By the time the curtain was rung up the music-hall manager of Brussels and myself were old friends.

There was a great round of applause when Madame Cécile came on the stage. The old man was lavish with his applause, and to help him out I joined in heartily. He was all excitement, and looked round eagerly to note the effect on the large audience. Everything appeared to be to his satisfaction. Then Madame Cécile sang.

She had a voice that was at once sweet and powerful, but evidently untrained. It was far in advance of anything I had ever heard in such a place, and when she retired the uproar was deafening.

"How like you?" said the old man to me in a stage whisper.

"It's splendid—splendid," I said. "She is far too fine a singer to be in a place like this."

"Ah, but there is money here. Grand opera?

Ah no ! " replied the old gentleman, who apparently resented my slighting allusion to the music-hall stage.

In spite of the applause, Madame Cécile would not come back, and at last the programme was continued with the regular features. However, she was to sing again at the end, and so the audience remained. The old man told me, with a sigh, as of one having experience, that she was very capricious, possessing all the faults of a prima donna without being recognised as one.

" Hard to manage," said the old manager, shaking his head, " but a gold mine—a gold mine ! "

If only he could get her to Brussels for a long enough time, his fortune was made. She had partly promised to go, but he was finding it difficult to persuade her to fulfil the engagement.

" She looks like a woman with a romance," said I, thinking of her serious, expressive face.

The old man's countenance was clouded. That was just the trouble, he told me confidentially. She *had* a romance. If he could but lay that romance he would be happy. Then he told me her story.

He had brought Madame Cécile out in Brussels.

She had made an instant impression, and the town crowded to hear her. She was very ambitious—hoped to get into grand opera. She saved up her salary, so that she might go to Italy and study, and the last contract she made with the old manager was to the effect that she was to have sufficient money to carry out her scheme when her engagement was finished. The old man was dead against the idea of grand opera. It was not in his line, and he feared to lose his gold mine.

At this point a young Englishman named Stansford came on the scene, and promptly fell in love with the beautiful singer. The Englishman's family, however, formed an obstacle to the marriage. He knew they would be bitterly opposed to such a match if they knew that the lady was a music-hall singer. He had plenty of money. His family were in trade, and had made a comfortable fortune in it, but were all the more anxious that their son should make what they called a proper match—that is to say, an alliance which would bring social distinction to the family.

Knowing the impossibility of overcoming this difficulty so far as his relatives' determination was concerned, young Stansford bribed a poor

but dishonest Belgian Count to claim the girl as his own daughter. The old Count lived mostly by gambling, and was very glad to get a comfortable annuity in return for becoming an adopted father. So the young lady with a title was introduced to the Stansford family, and they were delighted with the match.

To do the young woman justice, she opposed this scheme for nearly a year, but being convinced that in no other way could she become Mrs. Stansford, she at last reluctantly consented. Young Stansford was rather uneasy about the deception, but he considered that the end justified the means. They were married, and lived happily, but, alas! not all their days, as the story-books have it.

Stansford's mother was so very kind to the young woman who had given up a title to become plain Mrs. Stansford that at last the young lady thought she would tell her mother-in-law all about it. Then came a transformation scene. It was the lady and the tiger. The house was made too hot for the younger Mrs. Stansford, and although she might have put up with the treatment meted out to her by the rest of the family, she felt that her husband did not sufficiently uphold her, and the situation

became unbearable. One day, after being treated even more cruelly than usual, she flung off the jewels Stansford had given her, packed up just those dresses and belongings she had possessed when she married, and took the first steamer and train back to Brussels.

There she saw her former manager, and took up her old professional career. After a while she seemed to realise that he was balking her operatic ambitions, and she tried to carry them out in spite of him. In this she failed, and so had to return to the music halls again. So far she had refused to return to her old manager, my English-speaking neighbour, and his presence in Ghent was due to his hope that he might induce her to sing again for him in Brussels.

"Her husband must have been rather a poor sort of person if he never made any attempt to see her again," I commented.

"Oh, he attempted it often enough," answered the manager. "He quarrelled bitterly with his family, and came over here, trying his best to persuade her to go back with him; but she is very high-spirited, and would never even see him. I helped her to carry out her determination to have

nothing more to do with him, and when she discovered that, with the inconsistency of a woman she turned on me, and said that I had separated them. Lately he has not molested her at all, and now she is harder than ever to deal with."

The old man sighed. Evidently he had suffered in his time from the caprices of singers.

When at last Madame Cécile came on for the second time, the old man was as vociferous as ever with his applause. The lady looked at him, and distinctly frowned. At that he suddenly became silent, and seemed to regard it as a bad omen for the coming negotiations, but when her song was finished, she looked again at the old manager, and smiled. Instantly he was jubilant. He rose at once, and said he would go to see her before her mood changed.

The performance was over. My seat was so far in the front that it took me a long time to work my way down to the door. As I got there, I felt a touch on my shoulder. Instinctively I expected to see Jones, but as I looked round, I saw the Brussels manager, who seemed to be breathless and excited.

"Ah!" he cried, in tones of relief, "how I am glad I found you! I would have been in despair otherwise, as I knew not where you are stopping. Please be so kind as to come with me. Madame Cécile begs an interview with you."

CHAPTER XV

HOIST WITH HIS OWN PETARD

As I followed my companion to the green-room, he whispered to me—

"Do not say anything of what I have told you about the Madame's history. Unfortunately, I said that I had been talking to a gentleman from London, and at once she commanded me to bring you."

Behind the scenes we found Madame Cécile ready for going to her carriage, but walking impatiently up and down the room.

"This is the gentleman," said the manager propitiatingly.

"Ah!" cried the singer, looking me over from head to foot. "M. Gruber tells me that you are well acquainted with London. He also said that you complimented him on his English. That is the reason I ask you if you really are acquainted with London."

"Well, if you wish accuracy, I don't suppose any man living can say he is well acquainted with London. It is larger than Ghent."

"I know, I know," she said, with a trace of impatience. "I have lived there. Have you lived in London, or only visited it?"

"Both," I answered. "I lived there for some years."

"There is a City firm," she went on quickly, "whose name is Stansford and Son. Do you happen to know anything about it?"

"Nothing whatever. I have never heard the name before, to my knowledge."

"When do you return to England?"

"I am going back there in a couple of weeks." Then the thought of that unfortunate duel flashed across my mind. "At least, I *expect* to be back at that time."

"You will go to London?"

"Certainly."

She hesitated slightly before speaking again.

"You are a perfect stranger to me," she went on quietly, "yet I should like to ask you a favour."

"I shall be very happy to grant it," I assured her.

"Would you write and tell me something about Stansford and Son?"

"I will give you my address," Gruber interposed eagerly, "and you can write to Madame in care of me."

"No!" cried Madame, her eyes flashing. She gave a decided stamp with her little foot. "If you will be so kind as to write, monsieur, then I wish to have the letter sent direct to me."

"Certainly," I promised. "Might I ask whether it is of Stansford or of Son you are most anxious to receive information?"

Old Gruber, who had been much disturbed by the stamp of the foot, now turned green, and looked beseechingly at me. He thought I was going to give him away. Madame Cécile fixed her clear eyes on me, and after a moment said—

"My interest centres wholly on 'Son.' I want to know where he is and what he is doing. Do you think that will be hard for you to find out?" Then, after a pause, she said in a low voice, "He is my husband."

Old Gruber looked relieved, now that she had told it herself.

"Why don't you write to him direct," I asked bluntly, "if there has been any trouble?"

"I cannot do it," she replied. "I think he should have written to me, or at least tried to see me. But he is a very proud man, and so I suppose—— Well, I should like to know where he is, and whether he is well."

I looked at Gruber in astonishment. He had certainly given me to understand that Stansford had tried to see his wife, and as I remembered our conversation, he also said that the husband had written. Gruber was a picture of agony. Evidently he had not expected the conversation to take such a turn as this. I resolved to write that very night to a friend in London who could get me all the information possible, and I made up my mind to give her that information myself, and not trust it even to the post.

Meanwhile Gruber, obviously uneasy, insisted that they were keeping me, and that he was very much obliged to me for the service I had promised to undertake. He added that if there was any expense connected with it, he would be happy to defray it to any extent.

"I will do that," said Madame Cécile, with quiet decision. "I am sorry if I have kept you too long, monsieur."

I said that time was of no value to me in Ghent, and Gruber, who was evidently anxious that I should take my departure, held open the door.

"What will be your address after this week?" I questioned.

"After to-morrow night," said the lady, "I shall be in Brussels. I sing there for this gentleman." She told me the name of her hotel.

Gruber smiled and bowed, and I took my leave.

He followed me to the street.

"You see," he said, "how hard it is to deal with her. I happen to know that her husband has obtained a divorce and has married again, but it would break her heart, and perhaps spoil her voice, if she were told. Please do not tell her about it. Or, better still, do nothing more in the matter. It can lead to no good. Come, now; if you will not trouble her again I will pay you. Just say how much—not too much, you know," he added, with a spasm of economy. "I am not rich, but it has been so difficult to do anything with her that I do not want her mind disturbed any more."

My opinion of old Gruber had been going down considerably during the last half-hour. I felt sure he was a liar, and I suspected him of being a scamp.

"Will it be any convenience to you if I do nothing about this matter when I get to England?"

"Oh, of the very greatest," said the little man eagerly.

"Well, I will do nothing when I reach London, and will not even write to Madame Cécile from that city. There, that will cost you nothing."

I thought the old man would have embraced me, but I warded him off, and he closed the stage door. As I went out I ran against a man. We were both under the bright light.

"Hello!" he cried, "this is all the good *my* teachings have done you, is it? Well, I declare! Coming out of the stage door at midnight! Well, well!"

"You seem to know all about it, anyhow," I said, wondering who on earth he was. "What if I am? I don't know you. You have mistaken your man."

"Oh, come now; you can't get out of it that way," said the other. "That's too thin. No, sir; the fact is that you are caught, and you don't want to admit it. But you can't bluff *me*. I know you."

"Well, you seem to. I do remember seeing your face, but I can't for the life of me recall your name. Where did I meet you? In Chicago?"

" Guess again, my boy."

" New York ? "

" No, sir. Confess, now, that you never saw me. I'll bet a dollar you can't tell my name and never heard it."

" I know you first-rate, but I really can't tell where I met you," I was forced to admit. " Was it in London ? "

" No, sir," said the other, chuckling. " Well, I've had my revenge. Don't you remember meeting me at Bruges, at that dancing hall ? Ah ! now you do remember. I thought you would. Has that duel come off yet ? "

" No. You see, there was something lacking. Not about the duel, but about my remembering you. If you had had your wife with you I should have recognised you at once. You were linked together in my mind."

" That's what the clergyman who married us said," remarked the other, laughing good-naturedly.

" Now it's your turn for explanations," I said. " Why have you deserted your wife at this stage of the honeymoon, and in a strange city ? "

" Oh, she has met a lot of her friends, and we are all going to Brussels together to-morrow. The girls

have a whole month's adventures to talk over. Besides, we are not so awfully newly married as you seem to suppose. Six weeks now, by George!"

"That's an eternity," I agreed. "Still, it doesn't explain why you are haunting the stage door of a theatre, and at midnight, and obviously jealous of anyone that comes out."

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "that reminds me. You know the fellow you are going to fight? Well, he and a friend of his are staying at the same hotel we are in. Latham and I—Latham is the man of the other party—left the girls chattering together, and came to the variety entertainment. We heard they had a great singer appearing. She *is* good, isn't she? Well, while we were looking for a seat, we saw your man, apparently asleep, with his head on a table. I'd got you both rather mixed in my mind, and for a moment I thought he was you, so I shook him up. In a minute I saw he was drugged. Did I tell you I'm a physician? Well, I am. Haven't killed many people yet, but I haven't been practising long."

"Where is he now?" I interrupted. "Something's gone wrong: I should have come on the scene at the psychological moment."

"Oh, he's all right now," said the young doctor cheerfully. "Latham and I got him back to the hotel, but we had the deuce of a time bringing him round to his senses. He couldn't tell anything about it, though. I expect his beer had been drugged, yet nothing was taken from him. I suppose whoever was responsible for the drugging was watching his opportunity, and we came on him too suddenly.

"Well, when the excitement was over, I remembered that I had left my best umbrella in the theatre, and I tell you a man doesn't amount to much in *this* country without his umbrella. I came back right away, but found the place closed up—wouldn't have got it anyway, though, I guess."

"Why didn't you speak before, and we might have gone in by the stage door?"

"I never thought of it after I saw you, though I went round to the stage door on purpose to get in that way if I could. The moment I recognised you, I forgot all about the umbrella. I'm the champion forgetter. But look here, did you say that duel was off?"

"No," I said ruefully. "At least, I don't think it is."

"Well," said the American, "it seems to me you ought to know. Say, you aren't really going to fight him, are you? It's too absurd. What's the row about? Deadly insult, or anything of that sort? I thought you were only joking when you talked about it at Bruges, but my wife was more than half afraid you meant it. She's been worried about it, because she thought it was all on our account."

"Nothing of the kind," I assured him earnestly. "It was a silly quarrel about a seat in a railway carriage, and happened in England."

"Who's your second?"

"Baron de Bois acted for me in Bruges."

"A real live Baron? That ought to set you up in American society when you go back. But look here, can't you have this thing postponed, and choose a meeting-place in Brussels, then I'll attend as the surgeon. You must have a surgeon, mustn't you?"

"We didn't have one at Bruges."

"Oh, you've had one scrimmage, then? I see. The Baron was your second at Bruges, and I suppose he will be at Brussels too."

"No; you come on there both as second and

surgeon. I'll arrange for the fight to take place at Brussels, although I must admit I'm not anxious for it to take place anywhere, especially as I have promised to do it with pistols this time, and I can't hit a barn."

"All right," agreed the American cordially. "I've a plan that will make the fight a bloodless one. Good-night. I shall see you in the morning."

CHAPTER XVI

A MATTER FOR ARRANGEMENT

NEXT morning I went to the hotel at which Jones was stopping. The first person I saw there was Derwent, looking rather pale and anxious.

"How is Mr. Jones this morning?" I asked.

"He appears to be rather shaken," said Derwent, "and to tell you the truth, I don't wonder at it. He seems to have a mania for going alone to all sorts of low places, don't you know."

"Oh, he was not at such a very low place last night," I said mildly. "I was there myself."

"Indeed?" answered Derwent, lifting his eyebrows slightly. His tone seemed to imply that that was not as high a recommendation of the place as he might have desired, but he refrained from expressing his thought in words.

"Yes. I saw nothing of the trouble, though. My American acquaintances must have got Jones away very unobtrusively."

"I don't suppose such occurrences are any rarity in places like that, do you know," remarked Derwent languidly.

"I *don't* know, and I don't think so, either," I replied emphatically, for the man's nonchalance irritated me. "But, see here! Is there anyone interested in the death of your cousin? I am convinced there is a deliberate attempt being made to murder him. I don't think you should allow him to go about so much alone."

"What makes you think that?" asked Derwent anxiously. "There is no one who could possibly wish to kill him, with one exception."

"Well, then, that exception is trying to do it," I declared.

"Do you really think so?"

"I am sure of it."

"The only person," said Derwent deliberately, "that I can imagine would wish to see him dead is —I dislike to say it—is yourself."

"Me?" I cried. "Nonsense! Why should I wish to do him any harm? I believe I have saved his life on more than one occasion, and have since done my best to persuade him to take care of himself."

"Of course, I only speak in answer to what you yourself have said," Derwent replied, in tones of great friendliness. "I don't believe for a moment there has been any attempt made to murder him. Nevertheless, that is what an unprejudiced outsider would be apt to say."

"If Jones lives until I put him out of the way," I retorted, "he will be much older than Methuselah. By the way, I wanted to speak to you about the coming battle. The Baron de Bois told me that you insisted on our fighting again."

"Again? I should hardly call it *again*, don't you know," observed Derwent. "I did not insist. My cousin seemed to be dissatisfied, and to feel very bitter against you, therefore I had no option."

"Well, if it is still on, I want it put off until we reach Brussels. I have a friend there who will assist me. I presume you will offer no objection to postponement or change of place?"

"Personally, no. Still, I'm not sure what my cousin would say. I should have to consult him before I could give you a definite answer."

"I think I have something to say about that," I put in. "I refuse to fight in Ghent."

"Ah! In that case I presume we can do nothing

but submit. Still, Ghent as a place for a quiet meeting is decidedly preferable to Brussels. That's too much like fighting near London."

"Not at all. We can take the train out to Waterloo. I have a fancy to fight on the battlefield. I spoke to Jones once before about that, and I gathered that he had no objections."

"Really? Not a bad idea," conceded Derwent. "Devilish good idea, I should say myself."

"Yes, I flatter myself there is some brilliancy about it," I agreed. "It seems a pity to ignore such a fitting venue when it is within easy reach."

"It does, doesn't it? Still, the English were victorious at Waterloo, don't you know."

"Yes, I know. I think it is time for a change, don't *you* know."

"Possibly. I shall tell my cousin that the encounter will take place there."

After this conversation I sought my newly-found American friend. I discovered him in the smoking-room, growling about the antiquity of the English papers there, and growling at the scanty amount of American news contained in such papers as *were* available.

"Don't you think a rattling good daily on the

American plan would pay in London ? " he asked. " I do."

" Every American thinks that when he first comes over to England and tries to read the morning papers," I warned him. " No, I am quite sure it wouldn't pay."

" Why not ? "

" Well, in the first place no Britisher would buy it, and in the second place all the editors would be in jail for libel before the first week was out. Take my advice, and don't try to reform the British Press, my boy."

" Oh, by the way," went on the other, " let me introduce to you my friend Latham, of Chicago. Latham, this is an American with whom I struck up an acquaintance in Bruges. And that reminds me —I didn't catch your name."

" I know you didn't. I didn't throw it, you see."

I told him my name, then turned to Latham.

" Now, Latham, if you will kindly introduce me to your friend, I shall feel that I am getting acquainted all round."

" Christopher Columbus, don't you know *his* name either ? Thunder ! You are fine acquaint-

ances, you two. Allow me to present my friend, Howard Somers. I merely present him: I am not responsible for him, you know. And now I must go and assist at the packing. We are moving on to Brussels to-night."

"So Mr. Somers told me."

"Well, so long! Shall I see you at Brussels?"

"I think it very likely. Good-bye till then."

When Somers and I were left together I told him the result of my interview with Derwent, and asked him what scene he had in mind to prevent any tragedy working its way into the farce of the duel.

"Who is this man—your opponent's second, I mean?" asked Somers.

"Derwent is his name. I believe he is a cousin of Jones."

"Then that's all right. I guess I can fix it. Of course he will not be anxious to see his relative hurt. I fancy they are both just bluffing you."

"I don't think so—I wish I could. But Jones isn't at all that sort of man."

"Well, perhaps not. Still, that is my idea of it, though I suppose you ought to know By the way, did I understand you to say you can shoot?"

"I can shoot, but I can never depend on hitting what I shoot at."

"Oh, that's the way of it, is it? Well, it's not so bad as I thought. You know, some of our fellows on the other side of the pond have pretty good reputations as marksmen. I'll impress on this man what a splendid shot you are. I'll tell him you are like that preparation they advertise in connection with rats—'sure death.'"

"Rather a sound of 'rats' about that!"

"Well, he won't know any better. I shall persuade Derwent that his cousin is as good as dead if you fire at him."

"At Derwent? Well, that will be correct enough. Still, you don't understand these Englishmen. They are not afraid. Bluff won't work with them, I am convinced."

"No; not if there is any backing down to be done, but this is what I shall propose. I shall suggest, strictly between Derwent and myself, that we will not put bullets in the pistols. See? Then you will have all the honour and glory of fighting a duel, and none of the danger. Do you catch my meaning?"

"Yes, but I don't believe he will ever consent to it."

"Of course he will, if he is a sensible man," declared Somers. "I'm sure of it. By George, I will go and see him about it right away. Did you say he was in?"

"He's always in," I said. "He seems to be of rather an indolent disposition. I'll write you a note of introduction if you like, and if you really have the time to call on him now."

"I'll take the time," answered Somers readily. "I shall need only a few minutes if he is in the hotel. Yes, you just write me a line or two, or, better still, come right up with me."

"I'll come with you."

We found Derwent where I had left him, gazing out into the square.

"Mr. Derwent, this is my friend who is to act for me in the little matter about which we were speaking this morning."

Derwent bowed slightly, looking somewhat astonished.

"I thought you told me," he remarked, "that your friend was in Brussels."

"I am going there to-night," answered Somers, "but if you have time I should like to speak to you about the preliminaries."

"Certainly," replied Derwent at once. "Will you come up to my room?"

I went back into the smoking-room to wait until the conference was over. Somers was away a long time, and the moment he entered the room I saw defeat in his face.

"No, sir," he said, "he wouldn't hear of it. Got mad at the very suggestion, and I thought he was going to call *me* out. He paced up and down the room and said that the proposal was an insult to him as much as to his cousin. I guess they mean to fight, and I shall have to think of some other plan. Look here, would you have any objection to my consulting Latham? He is a lawyer, and a smart one, and it takes a lawyer to give efficient suggestions for the safe evading of the law."

"No objection in the least," I assured him. "But if I were you, Somers, I'd be careful about saying anything to the ladies, and you'd better caution Latham not to mention anything to them."

"Oh, I'll see to that," said Somers confidently. "We are going to stay a month at Brussels, and we shall have oceans of time to cook this thing up

in proper shape. When shall you be in Brussels ? "

" Well, I intended staying here another couple of days."

" That will be all right. There's no hurry, you know. Here's our address, and you can communicate with me if anything unexpected turns up. Look me up as soon as you come to Brussels, won't you ? Now I must go."

I strolled around the town for a while, and when I got back to my hotel at lunch-time I found a letter waiting for me. A messenger from the other hotel had left it, the porter said.

I tore it open, and found it was from Howard Somers, with an enclosure. Somers' note read—

" My dear Boy,—You see I was right, after all. I thought I should fetch 'em. I feel I shall enjoy this duel.—Yours, in haste, H. Somers."

The enclosure was as follows :—

" My dear Sir,—I hope you will overlook any heat I may have exhibited on first hearing of your proposal. It seemed to me most unusual. Still, I am as anxious as anyone can be to prevent trouble, especially since, as you said accurately, the cause

of dispute was so trivial. I will therefore agree to your proposal, with certain conditions, which I shall have the honour of proposing to you in Brussels.—Believe me, dear sir, yours truly,

"CHARLES DERWENT."

CHAPTER XVII

"BATTLE'S STERN ARRAY"

I SPENT two quiet days in Ghent after the others left, and then went on towards Brussels. Half-way between that city and the one I had just left, I stopped at Alost, another of those one-time capitals whose former grandeur is now represented by a few ruined buildings. The fifteenth-century Church of St. Martin, supposed to have been built by the architect of Amiens Cathedral, is in a much poorer state of preservation than the famous picture it houses, although popular tradition has it that Rubens painted the celebrated work in one single week of the year 1631.

My principal reason for visiting Alost, however, was to find out something about the first Belgian printer, one Thierry Maartens, who introduced printing into his native country in 1475, but beyond directing me to the inscription on his tomb in St. Martin's Church, and to the fine statue of Maartens

erected in the Grande Place, no one could give me any information. I did not stay to examine the old dungeons and implements of torture which are among Alost's sights, but went back to the station, and took the train for Brussels.

I lost no time in calling on Somers, and I found him enthusiastic over Brussels, which he called a pocket edition of Paris. I pointed out gently that most guide-books to Brussels mentioned this fact, and suggested it was curious that so far no one seemed to have discovered that Brussels was exactly like Brussels — an exceedingly cheerful, interesting, go-ahead city.

"But to come to matters of real moment," I went on, "have you seen Derwent yet, and have you learnt his suggested conditions?"

"To both questions, yes. We are only waiting for you now to let the slaughter begin. Come up to my room. I have all the particulars noted down, and Derwent read them over to verify their accuracy. Nothing like having things in writing, you know."

We went to the private sitting-room engaged by Somers. The ladies were out,—shopping, of course, —and we had the place to ourselves. Somers locked

the door to prevent interruptions, and then took out his notebook.

" Now, in the first place," he began, " Derwent changed his mind because of certain occurrences in regard to Jones, of which I will tell you later. His first condition is that in all circumstances the agreement is to be kept strictly secret. He insists on this, because if his cousin knew that he had been made the victim of a bogus duel, it would result in a complete break between them; and secondly, if such a thing got out as the fact that he agreed to act as second in a contest with unloaded pistols, he would lose caste with all his friends, which, naturally, he does not wish to do. This seemed to me quite reasonable, and so I agreed to it in your name. Was that right ? "

" Perfectly."

" Secondly, for the mutual protection of our men, he is to load *your* pistol, and I am to load the pistol of Jones. You have no objection to that, I suppose ? "

" Not in the least. In fact, I had thought of proposing some such arrangement myself."

" All right. Well, the last condition came out in this way. He asked me point blank if you knew

that the pistols were to be unloaded. Being a countryman of the immortal George Washington, I could not tell a lie, at least, I could not until it was too late to retract. You don't mind him knowing that, do you? I expect censure here, and am braced up to receive it. Launch out."

"I don't care a cent for the opinion of Mr. Derwent, estimable though he may be. So I don't object at all."

"Well, that snag's past. I breathe more freely. I told Latham about it, and he said I should have prevaricated. But then he's a lawyer, and it comes natural to him. He would have done it automatically. When Derwent knew that *you* knew of the arrangement, he insisted on his third and last condition. I imagine that he surmised all along that you were aware of the scheme, for this final condition is the one that he says made him change his mind about the unloading. It seems that Jones has developed lately a most quarrelsome nature, and his cousin is getting anxious about him. He wants to teach him a lesson. He tells me that in Ghent he had a row with someone, and that he promptly challenged

him. The fellow, it seems, had some sense, and would not go out."

" Thanks, Somers. That was a neat back-handed blow at me."

" Quite unintentional, I assure you. Still, I *do* think you deserve it. If you hadn't come across a friend and well-wisher like me, you would now probably be making arrangements for your funeral instead of being about to march triumphantly from the field of battle with honour completely satisfied, and no blood spilt.

" Well, this fellow, instead of aiding Jones in his sanguinary designs, threatened to give notice to the authorities, and have him put safely under lock and key. So Derwent thinks, and quite rightly, it seems to me, that Mr. Jones needs a lesson, or they will both get into trouble. He proposes that you give him the lesson, and this is how it is to be effected. You are to take the fire of Jones. Then, it appears, while Derwent counts five, you must fire at your opponent, who will be compelled to stand there and face you until you fire. Now, Derwent will count very slowly, and he wants you to aim directly at Jones's breast, so that Jones, who won't know, of course, that the pistol is unloaded,

will see that it is coolly pointed right at his heart. You will keep him in suspense until just before the last figure is named, and then you fire directly at him. Now Derwent has the idea that in those five seconds, and in the additional moment of agony when he thinks he is shot, Jones will make up his mind that duelling is not the fun he appears to think it is at the present moment. Personally, I think it isn't a bad scheme."

"You don't know Jones," I said decidedly. "I don't think his cousin appreciates his courage, either. He will stand up to the rack like a Trojan. He'll never flinch. Still, I am quite willing to give him the object lesson, and if I can make him feel for five seconds the uneasiness he has made me feel for five days I shall be more than satisfied."

"Very well. Shall I tell Derwent, then, that you agree to everything?"

"Certainly. I am only too glad to get out of it so cheaply."

"By the way, Jones has a couple of duelling pistols—old muzzle-loaders, I understand, which ought to be the proper thing. He offers them on the altar of friendship"

"Very good of him, I'm sure."

" He seems to go round primed for the occasion," commented Somers, laughing a little. " I am rather glad of it, for with the modern revolver, such as Latham and I carry, we should have some difficulty about the blank loading. I told Derwent that we always considered the unloaded gun the most dangerous in America, but I don't think he saw any humour in the expression, for he merely raised his eyebrows and said, ' Really.' Well, if they are ready, how would to-morrow morning suit you ? "

" First rate. I am anxious to have this nonsense over."

Next morning Somers, Latham, and I took tickets from the station du Midi for Braine l'Alleud, which is the nearest stopping place to the celebrated battlefield of Waterloo. At this little station, which is out in the country, and seems to be used only by travellers who want to view the battlefield, we found Jones and Derwent waiting for us. They had come by an earlier train.

Jones remained where he was when we stepped out on the platform, but Derwent approached in a friendly manner, and saluted us.

" Where do you propose that this meeting shall take place ? " said he to Somers.

"Well, I don't just know. I have never been here before. Suppose we walk up to the high ground, and look the country over?"

"Very well," answered Derwent, and then he fell back to join his cousin, who followed us.

We got rid of the importunities of the guides, who were there even in the winter time, on the chance of some eccentric English-speaking individual coming, by telling them that Latham was a guide we had brought with us from Brussels. There was not much danger of interruption, still, we desired to have the place of the fight as secluded as possible. The roads were very bad, being covered with a deep and sticky mud.

When we reached the pyramid crowned by the lion, Somers pointed to a small wood that lay in the direction farthest from Brussels.

"That strikes me as about the spot," he said. "I wish there was an electric tram going down that way, though. I do hate tramping through this mud."

Derwent agreed to the wood. A wood, he said, was not quite the best place for such a meeting, but in this instance he thought it would answer. Another long tramp brought us under the trees. The dis-

tance was paced off, and all the preliminaries arranged.

Our seconds tossed up for places, then I got under one tree and Jones stood under another. He had been gloomily silent all the morning. He spoke neither to us nor to his own second, except to give brief assent to anything Derwent proposed. The grim expression on his face made me rejoice that there were to be no bullets in the pistols. The pistol case was opened, and in velvet beds lay side by side a couple of duelling weapons. Derwent held them by the barrel towards Somers, who took both the pistols, balanced them in his hands for a moment, and chose one. Then the seconds retired a few steps from each other, and began loading the weapons. Next they exchanged pistols, and Somers handed me mine. All these little arrangements were so like the real thing that they had the effect of making me very nervous and anxious.

" Did you see that the pistol was empty before you loaded it ? " I asked Somers, in a whisper.

" Yes ; I risked my life by blowing down the muzzle. Both were empty. You're perfectly safe. Don't be afraid. Brace up, old man."

" I don't suppose for a moment that he *would*

do such a thing, but Derwent might have slipped a bullet in that pistol after you handed it to him."

"Nonsense, it couldn't be done. He took it from my hand, and gave it directly to Jones. He is perfectly square. I'll stake my word on it."

"If they tried any foul play," said the lawyer, "we would make them suffer for it."

"Yes, I know. That was what the other lawyer said to the man who was to be hanged. It didn't console the man any. Still, I suppose it is all right."

"Of course it's all right," said Somers cheerily. "Here, have a drop of Dutch courage. It will brace your nerves. I never travel without a flask."

The brandy steadied me again, and as I drank it I caught an approving look in Derwent's eye, which said—

"Excellent! You are acting this thing to perfection."

"Is your man ready?" asked Derwent.

"We are quite ready," answered Somers.

"Will you give the word?" questioned Derwent.

"No," said Somers quickly. "You had better do that. Now, old man," he added to me, "re-

member that you are to stand in front of the tree, and not to get behind it." Then he said in a whisper: " Remember your bargain to wait until he counts five, drawing a bead all the time with a steady hand on Jones."

" Gentlemen," said Derwent, " I will say ' Ready ! ' then I will count slowly ' One—two—three.' After the word ' three ' you may fire. If one fires, and the other does not, I shall continue counting slowly up to five. During the counting the one that has not fired may do so, but not after the word ' five ' has been spoken. Have I made my meaning clear to both of you ? "

" Yes," I said, and Jones bowed his head in assent.

" Ready ! " said Derwent, in a clear, steady voice.

" One ! *Two* ! THREE ! "

Bang went the pistol that my opponent pointed directly at me.

In spite of what I knew, it was a moment or two before I could convince myself that I was unhurt. Jones held his smoking pistol by his side, and stood there without moving a muscle. I aimed directly at his breast, but he was as unmoved as a statue.

"One—two—three—four——"

The counting was very slow. I could not but admire the courage of my opponent. As his second said the word 'four,' I suddenly resolved that Jones should know that I did not want to hurt him, and just before 'five' was uttered, I raised the pistol, and fired into the air. A neatly cut twig fell at my feet.

That pistol had a bullet in it.

CHAPTER XVIII

A COUPLE OF LETTERS

THE moment I realised that my pistol had been loaded I looked at Derwent. He was gazing at me. His face was a ghastly greenish colour, and his lips were almost white.

I went up to him, and said quietly—

"Mr. Derwent, I want to see you at my rooms to-night, at eight o'clock. Don't fail to come, and I should advise you to come alone."

He tried to assume his customary jaunty smile as he answered—

"Do you want to fight me too?"

"Will you come?"

"Yes; remember your promise."

"What promise? Oh, as to secrecy, you mean? Yes, I will keep that unless any accident happens to Mr. Jones in the meantime."

At this moment Jones himself came up, and held

out his hand to me. I took it willingly, but I said to him—

"Jones, you tried to kill me."

"You are mistaken," he answered. "Not that it is a proper subject for us to discuss, but as you were so magnanimous about your shooting I may say that all I tried to do was to take a notch from the sleeve of your coat, and I can't for the life of me see how I missed it at that distance, except that I don't feel quite myself to-day."

"All right," I said. "That's done with, anyhow. Let us get back to Brussels."

"With all my heart," said Jones, from whom a burden seemed to have been lifted. "Won't you come and dine with me to-morrow night? Do you think your friends would honour me also? I should be very pleased to see them."

"I heard them saying that they had planned out every hour of this week," I answered, "but I will ask them. As for myself, I shall be more than glad to accept your invitation."

By this time we were all moving toward the station again. We discovered a more direct route back, but it was no less muddy than the one we had traversed before. I conveyed Jones's message to

Somers and Latham, but, as I anticipated, they could not accept, since their party had arranged to go to the Opera.

Jones dropped back to where I was walking along, meditating on the situation. It was quite evident to me that for some reason Derwent was anxious for me to murder Jones. I presume that as we were all accessaries, more or less, after and before the act, he thought none of us would dare to say anything about the tragedy when it had happened.

" Jones," I said, " I want to ask you a couple of personal and presumably impertinent questions, and I wish that you would answer them."

" I think I may promise that I will," replied Jones, with that caution habitual to him.

" First, are you a rich man ? "

" Reasonably so. In fact, I may say yes. Have you run short of money ? I shall be most happy to accommodate you, for I feel very much in your debt. I know that the sum of assistance stands heavily against me."

" No ; I don't want to borrow, thank you. My second question is : If I had snuffed you out a moment ago, who would have benefited principally by your death ? "

"My cousin Derwent would come in for the bulk of it."

"Ah! Then he must be rather disappointed at the outcome of the affair."

"Oh, I assure you, you wrong him very much indeed. He is not that kind of a man. I sometimes feel that I am hardly doing the right thing, you know, in standing in his way. We have a little agreement by which he gets a suitable income, but his debts are so many that he prefers to live abroad. More his misfortune than his fault, I assure you. I often think he would enjoy the money much more than I do. Still, it is mine, or at least I think I have the best claim to it, as it was all earned by my father."

When I reached my hotel at Brussels, I found waiting for me a letter from London. It brought the pretty singer, Madame Cécile, to my mind, for it was in answer to the one I had written from Ghent.

"In reply to yours *re* the Stansford family," it ran, "I may say that if you have any of the firm's paper it is good to almost any amount. There isn't any Stansford, and there doesn't appear to be much of a Son. Young Stansford is rather a wild fellow,

I take it, and is at present on his ranch somewhere in the States. He made a mistake in the matrimonial line some years ago—married a ballet dancer or some one of that sort, so far as I can learn, and he left her, or she him, I don't quite know which. About a year ago his mother died, and shortly after that his father. The young man, who seems to be a worthless fellow, went to the States, and bought a ranch. He came home again some time ago, but has gone back to America. The business is run by the man who was manager for twenty years under Stansford senior. If you want to communicate with the young man, write to the manager, Mr. Bloxham, care of Stansford and Son. That will find him."

This was scarcely a letter that I could show to Madame Cécile, but I thought I would stroll up to her hotel, and tell her what I had learned. The porter told me that there was a matinee performance that day, so Madame Cécile was at the theatre. I went on to the theatre, and found my old acquaintance Gruber, who seemed quite anxious when I asked to see the singer.

"I thought," he said, "that you were not going to disturb her mind by making any inquiries when you went back?"

" Neither am I," I said truthfully. " But if you don't let me see her when I want to, I will telegraph the information to her, and then you cannot intercept it."

" My dear sir," said the manager, shocked at such an imputation, " I would never presume to stop any communication that came to Madame. If you wish to see her, you may go in at any time."

Here he spoke to his doorkeeper at the stage entrance, and apparently told him that he was to admit me, or any friends that I might bring, behind the scenes. We went in together, and he knocked at the door of Madame Cécile's room. It was opened by a trim little French maid.

When the lady recognised me, she sprang to her feet. In her imperious manner she ordered M. Gruber out of the room. He reluctantly consented to withdraw, saying—

" You see, I have brought him. Why do you distrust me ? "

" Have you been to London already ? " she asked me, the moment the door was shut.

" Is there a possibility of the manager overhearing what I say to you ? " I replied, not wishing to say I had not been out of Belgium since I last saw her.

She asked her maid to stand outside the door. Then, turning sharply to me, she said—

"You have news. I pray you, do not keep me waiting."

"I have written to London. I wrote within a few hours of leaving you that night at Ghent, so that there should be no delay. I find that old Mr. Stansford and his wife are both dead. Your husband is on his ranch out in America."

"His ranch? What is that?"

"A very large farm. In fact, hundreds of farms all in one."

"But he is not a farmer!"

"I know. But it is not an unusual thing for a young Englishman, either with or without a good deal of money, to turn cowboy. These ranches are stocked with cattle, you know."

"Is the ranch in New York?"

"Well, no," I said; "they are generally a little farther west."

"Then I will save my money, and I will go to him. I suppose, when I land in New York, I should be able to find my way to the ranch easily enough?"

"I am afraid there might be a little difficulty, Madame. You see, the ranch may be as far from

New York as New York is from Brussels. You would have to find out the locality of the ranch before you started."

"Do you think that without much trouble to yourself you could find out where the ranch is situated?" asked Madame Cécile eagerly.

"I can learn all about it without the slightest trouble," I assured her. "I will write again to my friend in London, and shoulder all the trouble on to him."

"I shall be so very much obliged," she said earnestly. "Believe me, I would not lightly cause you so much annoyance for a mere stranger, but it means everything to me, and I have no friends to whom I might apply."

"It will be a great pleasure," I said, "and I hope I shall be able to discover everything you want to know in this matter."

I found Gruber hovering round the stage door, anxious to know what Madame Cécile had said. I told him that she wished me to go to London as soon as possible and obtain the information she wanted.

I spent the rest of the afternoon writing, and before eight o'clock was ready for Mr. Derwent.

"Sit down, Mr. Derwent," I said, when he came in. "You look rather haggard."

"The walk from the station and back through the mud this morning was enough to make anybody haggard," he said lightly. "You wanted to see me? It was not, I suppose, to comment on my looks?"

"No, it was not. I have a friend in London, Mr. Derwent, who is a very expert detective."

"Have you really? How very interesting, don't you know. I have not the pleasure of the acquaintance of any gentleman in that grade of society."

"Still, you might have in the future, you know."

"Do you think so? Really, one can't tell beforehand."

"That is quite true," I agreed. "I have written a long letter to my friend this afternoon. I thought you might like to hear some of it."

"Haven't the slightest curiosity, I'm sure. I never care for anyone else's correspondence. Rarely take the trouble to read my own. Bills mostly."

"Well, this has more interest, or ought to have, for you, because in certain contingencies it will

cause you to be arrested for murder. Murder means hanging, you know."

"So I've been told. But, really, my dear sir, if you have nothing more interesting to say I must beg of you to excuse me. I intended going to the theatre to-night."

"Now, Derwent, there is no use in affecting indifference. As we say in America, it is too thin. You put a bullet into the pistol I was to fire this morning, and you meant me to kill your cousin. It is the old story. You want the property. Ever since he has been in Belgium he has been followed by the men you hired to murder him, and they have come pretty close to succeeding more than once.

"In this letter I have related all these facts, giving dates and places as fully as possible. I have also related in detail the duelling experience, with the names of those who were present. On the envelope I have written: 'To be opened and acted upon in case of the sudden or in any way mysterious death of Henry Jones of London.'

"I give your name as that of the probable murderer, and I enclose all this in an envelope addressed to my friend the detective. The facts

will thus only become known in case of the death of Mr. Jones. I thought it was but fair to give you this warning before you ran your neck into a noose. Now, if you like, we will walk down to the theatre."

"I shall be delighted to have your company," said Derwent genially. "Americans are such funny people, don't you know."

"Very funny," I agreed. "Come along."

When we reached the post office I asked him to come in.

"There is the letter," I said, showing it to him. "Now it is dropped into the box. Neither you nor I can get it out again. To-morrow it will be in London, and in the hands of the detective. If you are as long-headed as I suppose you to be, you will take warning."

Derwent looked at me for a moment, then he said—

"You've no sort of an idea what an ass you are."

He laughed as he turned away, in a manner that showed he was either not in the least frightened or was a capital actor. Somehow, that laugh disturbed and disconcerted me.

CHAPTER XIX

"HE LAUGHS BEST——"

NEXT morning I met Mr. Derwent in the street. He smiled cynically at me as he paused.

"I presume," he said, "that your friend the detective has your important document by this time?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I'm ignorant of the time at which the Brussels post arrives in London. Still, it doubtless will get there. I am not worrying about it."

"Aren't you really? Now, that's fortunate, for neither am I. So, if your friend does not worry either, it will be all right, won't it?"

"I suppose so."

"I wonder that you did not ask me for my photograph to send him," went on Derwent, still smiling.

"By George, that wouldn't be a bad idea! I never thought of that. I'll do it."

"Will you really? I'm sorry that I cannot offer

you one; I have not had one taken for several years. I should so much like to oblige you if I could."

"Oh, that's like the document. You needn't worry about it. I *have* one."

"One what?"

"One of your photographs."

"You—the deuce you have! Then you must be a thief as well as a——"

"As a murderer? Oh no! It is not theft to take a picture when you do it with your own camera. I took a splendid one of you as you stood lounging in front of your hotel in Ghent. It is really a good one, and has no retouching to disguise the features. I'm ever so much obliged for the suggestion. I'll send it to London."

Derwent did not laugh this time. He looked as if it would have given him great pleasure to throttle me, but such a proceeding might have got him into trouble in so well regulated a city as Brussels.

That afternoon I spent in riding on as many of the several dozen electric tram lines as I could find time for, and saw enough of the busy city to make me determine to explore it more thoroughly. In the evening I dined with Jones.

Derwent had excused himself, and did not put in an appearance, for which I was grateful. After dinner, Jones proposed that we should go to some place of amusement.

"With all my heart," said I. "Is there any particular place that you would like to go to?"

"I have no preference," he answered. "I am entirely at your service."

"Very well. Suppose we go and hear Madame Cécile? We shall be in time for her first song."

Jones did not seem at all enthusiastic, and it appeared to me that the usual English impassiveness of his face deepened, as though he had put on a mask.

"I have heard her sing already," he said rather coldly. "If there is any other place you would care to go, I should prefer it."

"I am greatly interested in Madame Cécile," I said. "I have had the privilege of several chats with her, and I tell you she is a fine woman, and a plucky one too. She is saving up her money just now to go to her husband, who is on a ranch in America. I have undertaken to find out where the ranch is. Madame Cécile seemed to imagine it was a New York suburb, to be reached by tram car."

" Her husband ! " exclaimed Jones, the impassivity giving way a little.

" Yes. Of course you knew she was married ; hence the ' Madame.' As far as I could make out from old Gruber, her manager, she married a worthless fellow named Stansford. From all accounts she was miles too good for him, but she fell in love with him, as fine women will care for no-account men, and it doesn't take much observation to tell that she's in love with him still, in spite of everything. Now that he has made no effort to find her, she is going to make an effort to find *him.* It is not likely that he is worth the search : they rarely are."

" You are right," said Jones, in so stern a voice that I looked up at him. He was now on his feet. A change had come over his face that astonished me. He seemed to have grown twenty years older in as many minutes.

" Good gracious, Jones ! " I cried, " what is the matter ? "

" The matter is that I am going to my wife," he said. " My name is Henry Jones Stansford. Come with me, and advise that villain Gruber to keep out of my way."

"What has Gruber done?"

"What hasn't he done! Lied to me—intercepted my letters and sent them back. Told me that my wife refused to see me, and sent taunting messages. Done? D——n him! I'll strangle him if I get my hands on him."

"That's right, Jones—I should say Stansford. I told you once that all you required to make a man of you was a little strenuous language. But wait one moment. You are not to touch Gruber on this occasion, and you are to keep a reasonably good hold of the temper that I see you possess, after all. You will promise?"

"Yes, yes. I'll promise anything. Only let us get away."

We hailed a cab, and were soon driving along the streets of Brussels.

"Then I suppose," I said, "that your cousin's name is not Derwent?"

"It is, just as mine is Jones. Charles Derwent Stansford is his name. He is the only son of my father's only brother. Do you think you can get me in at the stage door without any row?"

"I think so, unless Gruber is there."

Once more the Englishman heaped maledictions on the old manager.

" Are you going to take your wife right away before the performance is over ? "

" Of course I am. I will take her away, even if I have to go on the stage for her."

" Now, look here, Jo—Stansford, don't do anything dramatic. This thing must be done calmly and in order. If she is singing, you must wait in the wings until she comes out. Let's have no tragedy. You don't want a full account of this to get into the papers, do you ? "

" No, I don't."

" Very well, then. Be guided by me. I am somewhat calmer than you are. By the way, how was it that my friend heard you were in America ? "

" Because no one knows that I didn't go to America. America be——"

" Hold on, Jones, hold on ! " I interrupted. " You are learning your lesson too fast. America is sacred."

" Excuse me," said Jones at once, with his old punctiliousness.

" All right," I said magnanimously. " I will apologise to America for you. Here we are."

The old man at the door let us in without question. Gruber was not in sight, for which I was thankful.

"Where is her room?" demanded Stansford, when we were inside.

"Here it is. You had better let me go in and prepare her."

He did not answer me, but pushed open the door, and going in, shut it behind him. There was a little cry, and then all was still.

M. Gruber came from some hidden place among the scenery, and seeing me there, began to smile in his repulsive way, and rubbing his wrinkled hands together, approached.

"I am afraid," he began, "that you cannot see the Madame just now. She sings next."

"I don't wish to see her," I answered smoothly. "Her husband is with her."

There was no question about the quality of the swearing that Gruber indulged in on hearing this announcement. He tried to swear in three languages at once, and in a measure succeeded.

He pushed open the door without the formality of knocking, and there we saw Stansford watching his beautiful wife, who was laughing and crying at

the same time, and hastily throwing on her cloak. Gruber had obviously interrupted an elopement.

"Madame!" he shouted, stamping his foot with rage, "remember that you are under contract to sing here. I insist on your fulfilling it."

Stansford's thin lips were set almost in a straight line. His eyes flashed, and his fingers twitched nervously.

"Look here, Gruber," said I, "the less you say about contracts the better. The inevitable has come at last. Grin and bear it."

"My contract, sir, is legal. There is a law in Belgium, I would like you to know. You are the cause of all the trouble, you sneaking villain!"

"All right, Gruber," I said nonchalantly. "Abuse *me*; that is quite safe. But you'd better not interfere with Stansford."

"For three months, the contract reads, with option of renewal. Drawn by the best lawyer in Brussels."

"Stand aside, you wretch!" said Stansford, when his wife was ready.

"You shall not go!" screamed the manager.

As Stansford and Gruber glared at each other, a boy put his head in at the door and cried—

" Madame Cécile ! "

" The stage waits ! " wailed the manager, wringing his hands. " The stage is waiting."

" Let it wait," said Stansford hoarsely. " Come, Adèle."

It was curious to see the effect of habit on the singer. The moment the call boy shouted her name, she automatically loosened her cloak, and then, thinking of the situation, she let it hang picturesquely on her shoulders, and looked up at her husband.

" *Madame Cécile !* " shouted the call boy, putting his head a second time within the door. The audience was making its impatience audible.

" May I ? " asked the singer.

" If you wish, dear," answered her husband.

The cloak was dropped on a chair, and the next instant we heard the multitude's vociferous applause. We all stepped out of the room to the wings. Hostilities ceased while the song thrilled the air.

When the song was finished, Madame Cécile, without waiting for the inevitable recall, stood where she was, with her hands clasped in front of her, and sang again " Home, Sweet Home." She sang it like a prima donna. Her whole soul seemed

to be in that song. Although not one in a hundred of that vast audience understood the words, they understood the pathos of the music, and the huge hall was as silent as if it were empty.

I glanced at Stansford, as he stood resolutely with his back against the wall, which inside was of bare brick. Tears were in his steel-grey eyes, but his attitude had all an Englishman's stolid resolve not to give any indication of his emotion. Seeing me looking at him, he whispered, with an air of saying something off-hand—

" There's nothing like those old English ballads, is there ? "

" English ! " I exclaimed. " Why, that's American, my boy,—written by an American."

" Is it really ? I always thought it was an English song."

Then there came a burst of applause, and Madame Cécile was beside us again. She went into her room to prepare for leaving. Stansford stood at the door, like a sentinel at his post.

" She must come back to-morrow," said old Gruber insistently. " I have the contract. There is a ten thousand franc forfeiture if she does not fulfil it."

"Why didn't you say that before, instead of making all this fuss?" exclaimed Stansford, as a shade of relief passed over his face. "Come to my hotel to-morrow, and I will give you twenty thousand francs."

"Ah, Mr. Stansford," whined the manager, still wringing his hands, "you are a rich man. Give me thirty thousand, and I will say nothing."

"Very well, then. Don't talk to me any more."

Gruber looked sorry that he had not asked a larger sum, but he offered no opposition to their leaving.

When the carriage rolled away, Gruber shook his fist after it.

"As the auctioneer says, going at thirty thousand, eh, old man?" I remarked pleasantly. "*You* needn't growl. You've made a good thing of it."

I regret to say that the manager broke forth into a string of profanity that was shocking to hear from one of his years. Giving him a cordial invitation to visit me in America, I left him standing at the stage door of his theatre.

When I got back to my hotel, I wrote the following letter to Mr. Charles Derwent Stansford :—

"Dear Sir,—I understand now why you laughed

at me at the post office. I had sent the detective wrong names both for you and for your cousin. You will be pleased to hear that I have rectified this mistake, and that I sent your photograph with the correction.

"He laughs best, you know.—Yours truly,

"THE AMERICAN."

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